

SOCIAL REALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Alice Guillermo

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For Po-po-lo, Sofie, Bomen and
For the artists and friends
in a common aspiration

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SPOLIARIUM 1884
Juan Luna

1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Philippine art in the last fifteen years has shown a strongly discernible thrust on the part of a growing number of young artists towards an art of socio-political significance. At the forefront of this movement are the Social Realists who create an art which proceeds from keen social observation into a position of engagement in current issues arising from recent historical experience. An artistic trend appearing in the late Sixties, social realism did not spring up overnight in the art scene. Rooted as it is in a commitment to social ideals within a dynamic conception of history, social realism in the visual arts grew out of the politicized Filipino consciousness with its high moments in the Revolution of 1896 and the First Quarter Storm in 1970.

It holds for a fact that a number of issues which persist in the national reality and which social realism continues to deal with today were first articulated in the nineteenth century. The Propaganda Movement and the subsequent Philippine Revolution of 1896 were phases of the anti-colonial struggle in the Spanish Colonial Period. While the Propagandists consisting of Filipino expatriates in Spain, among them Jose Rizal, issued the *Solidaridad* as the vehicle in their campaign for reforms, the Katipuneros launched the movement for independence through armed struggle. The issues of anti-colonialism extend today into the anti-imperialist struggle waged by the enlightened and politicized citizenry. Juan Luna's prizewinning *Spoliarium* (1884) which portrays Roman soldiers dragging wounded and dying gladiators across the basement floor of the Coliseum has always been viewed as a powerful allegory of colonial oppression, through its subject derived from the classical antiquity of the Roman ruling class and their gladiator victims, captive warriors from their imperialist forays.

It was in literature, however, particularly in Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* that the anti-colonial issues

were directly confronted: colonial miseducation, the military depredations of the *Guardia Civil*, the abuses of the friars, the feudal system in general with its attendant oppression, unjust taxation, and forced labor. Realizing the futility of the campaign for reforms, the masses, fired with the ideal of independence rose up in arms in the Philippine Revolution of 1896 which was, however, frustrated from attaining its goal of independence by the duplicity of the United States posing as an ally and by the early capitulation of the *ilustrados* protective of their class interests.

The anti-colonial struggle thus continued into the twentieth century with the American Occupation of the Philippines and the Commonwealth regime in the Thirties. American military occupation took effect with the imperialist Treaty of Paris in 1898 which, in total disregard of the Filipino people's sentiments as expressed in the nationwide Revolution, formalized a change of masters from the Spaniards to the Americans. Anti-colonial resistance from patriotic Filipinos continued in the Filipino-American War at the turn of the century which exacted a high toll of lives from the native population. A popular vehicle for the expression of fervid-anti-colonial sentiments was found in the *zarzuela*, a locally developed musical drama of Spanish influence. This served as a cultural channel, often clandestine, of the nationalism suppressed by enactments such as the Anti-Sedition Law and the Flag Law which forbade display of the Philippine flag.

In the same period, other issues came to the fore. Agrarian unrest which simmered through the Spanish Period erupted in a series of bloody peasant uprisings, such as the colorum revolts in 1924 and the Sakdalista uprising in 1935 which ended in the massacre of peasants by landlords asserting their traditional privileges with the legal and military support of the colonial government. Meanwhile, companies and factories were put up to process products extracted from the countryside by American and other foreign entrepreneurs with large profits siphoned out of the country. For the legal protection of the growing class of urban workers, labor unions were organized, the first being the *Union Obrera* founded by Isabelo de los Reyes in 1901 after his exile in Barcelona. The consciousness of the Fili-

pino proletariat was raised with the initiation into the labor movement and its workers' issues.

Meanwhile, the public school system of education instituted by the Americans who brought over the first English teachers resulted in the widespread dissemination of the English language and, more importantly, of values which conditioned generations of Filipinos to pervasive colonial influence and control in all areas of life. With the massive educational thrust came the demand for illustrations for textbooks and cultural publications, as well as a new orientation towards commercial art to meet the demand of American and foreign business establishments located mainly in the districts of Escolta and Binondo.

In literature, the trend of the period was the romanticization of the countryside in the rural versus urban theme as a reaction to industrialization which was within the extractive colonial context and regarded as a threat to native traditional values. In the visual arts, there was a parallel romanticization of the rural setting (in fact, the countryside then lay just outside the borders of the city), a trend which reached its high point in the Thirties with the paintings of Fernando Amorsolo who was the maestro of an entire generation raised in idyllic country landscapes and genre. Amorsolo's prolific production which made use of backlighting and warm glowing colors for a heightened emotional effect created an innocent and serene world removed from the convulsions of agrarian uprisings which were a salient reality of the period.

The Commonwealth Period from 1935 to 1946 was marked by intellectual ferment in art and culture. The first debate had to do with the issue of "art for art's sake" versus "proletarian art". Camps formed on both sides, the spokesman for the first being Jose Garcia Villa, and for the second Salvador P. Lopez. The proponents of "art for art's sake" argued for the absolute autonomy of art which was to be regarded as a self-contained realm unto itself, rejecting social or political references or allusions as "impure". On the other hand, the proponents of "proletarian art" upheld the opposing theory that art should reflect social reality and, in particular, reflect the interests and aspirations of the masses of workers. In its

historical context, the term "proletarian art" was derived from the political literature of the New Left in the United States which, in the Thirties was undergoing a serious economic depression following the Crash of Wall Street in 1929 resulting in massive unemployment, poverty, and social dislocation. At the same time, labor issues acquired prominence, politicizing large numbers of workers, farmers, as well as intellectuals nationwide. The highly charged political climate of the United States reached the Philippines through the publications of the period and through the pensionados studying abroad. With Lopez on the side of "proletarian art" were Manuel Arguilla, Carlos Bulosan, and H.R. Ocampo. Better known at the time as writer and literary editor of the *Sunday Chronicle*, Hernando R. Ocampo painted expressionist art of strong social content up to the Fifties after which he increasingly turned to abstraction.

Also during the Commonwealth Period was the debate in the visual arts between the modernists and the conservatives. Victorio Edades, who spearheaded the modernist movement in the country upon his return from the United States, was joined by Carlos Francisco and Galo B. Ocampo, thus forming the first "triumvirate" of modernists. The conservative position was defended by academy stalwarts Fernando Amorsolo and Guillermo Tolentino who were trained in the classical tradition. Edades taught the lessons of modernism mainly through teaching and writing. He urged artists not to copy foreign models but to develop a Philippine idiom. He also pointed out that art does not only include the beautiful but also the ugly, the dark, and frightening. His influence led to the expansion of the subject matter of art and the exploration of new idioms.

The status of the Philippines as a colony of the United States involved the country in the war between the Allied and Axis powers. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Philippines fell prey to Japanese militarism and expansionism in Asia with the country occupied by the Japanese imperial forces for four years up to 1945. Needless to say, the war and the occupation caused widespread suffering among the population, large numbers of which joined the anti-Japanese resistance under the USAFFE or the Huks (Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon) which drew a politicized peasantry based in

Central Luzon. In the midst of suffering, misery, and hunger, artists crystallized the images of their time in painting and sculpture. Among the common war subjects were the Death March from Capas in Tarlac to Bataan, the torture and execution of guerrillas. An outstanding painting of the war was Demetrio Diego's *Capas* portraying wounded and dying men stretched out on bamboo beds. Common subjects of paintings were city ruins and beggars finding shelter in bombed-out buildings, as in Legaspi's *Stairway* and *Man and Woman* in an expressionist-cubist idiom of monochrome browns.

With the end of the war in 1945 and the "granting" of independence in July of the following year when the country still visibly suffered the ravages of war, the issue of nationalism came to the fore. Since the Philippines had won independence and sovereignty, how was her cultural identity to be defined before the assembly of nations? Writers assailed the continuing subservience to American culture and values and deplored the consequent "hybrid culture." While some dwelt on the values of what they called the "Spanish heritage," others discovered the rich artistic resources of the country's folk and ethnic art. The art of the numerous national minorities and that of the Muslim Filipinos came to the admiring attention of the Manila public through the press. The hitherto unknown *naga* and *sari-manok* were introduced into the consciousness of scholar and artist and became incorporated into the visual vocabulary, with the effect of widening the range of art-consciousness from museum and gallery works to folk art expressions.

These new elements certainly enriched the concept of national identity which sought its origins in pre-colonial culture, accompanied by nostalgic revivals of indigenous and period cultural expressions. But while these concepts geared nationalism along cultural lines in the quest for a definition of the authentic Filipino — thus resulting in a body of Filipiniana documenting manners and mores, customs and costumes, indigenous art and technology — a new direction was pointed out by Claro M. Recto in the definition of nationalism along political lines: to uphold the national interest vis-a-vis American interests which manifested a neo-colonial relation in the insistence on parity rights and the maintenance of military bases. Recto's nationalist crusade likewise served to expose the subservience of successive

post-war regimes to the control of foreign monopoly capital in the economic, political, and cultural spheres.

Art in the Fifties sought to resolve the issue of cultural identity by focusing on the natural and social environment. The experience of the Second World War and the widespread poverty which resulted from it created a trend of social consciousness among the postwar artists — a trend which echoed the “proletarian art” of the pre-war years. It was since the war that paintings of slums, *barong-barongs*, and jeepneys appeared as the artists’ immediate reality replacing Amoroso’s rural idyls. A key painting of the period is Manansala’s *Madonna of the Slums*. While H.R. Ocampo, Manansala, and Legaspi developed the new urban imagery, Carlos Francisco of Angono enriched Philippine genre with his intimate knowledge of the daily lives of fisherman and farmer. With gradual economic recovery, however, the artistic temper changed and the subjects of social meaning became increasingly transformed into folk-decorative and picturesque motifs in cubistic compositions, losing the sentiments which originally inspired them. For the modernists of the Fifties, the social theme in art was but an immediate and temporary response to external conditions, not an orientation or point of view.

The decade of the Sixties was marked by a definite growth in socio-political consciousness spearheaded by student groups. The decade opened with vigorous student demonstrations in 1961 against the Congressional Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities purportedly instituted to investigate the publication in a State university journal of an article on peasant war in the Philippines. It was also in 1961 that the Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines (SCAUP) was founded with the avowed aim of opposing obscurantism and raising political consciousness. With the SCAUP and the *Kabataang Makabayan*, a militant youth group founded in 1964, the studentry began to manifest an increasingly palpable presence on the national scene. The later years of the decade saw a significant intensification of political involvement in numerous teach-ins, rallies, demonstrations, with casualties on the students’ side in scuffles with anti-riot police. The period also saw workshops in different art forms, in committed poetry, music, and drama, such as the PAKSA in literature, active in 1971, in

order to create art that would "serve the people". Highlighting the rallies were skits and musicals satirizing political figures and street plays dramatizing the three evils of Philippine contemporary society: feudalism, neo-colonialism, and bureaucrat-capitalism and raising the banner of the people's struggle.

The visual artists, in search of more popular forms of high visual impact, did large wall paintings and instant murals on rolled canvases, complemented by extensive political graffiti. Nationalist and socio-political themes, in protest or satire, found expression in various forms, such as prints, posters, comics, and editorial cartoons reaching a wider public, aside from paintings. Some artists who took up these themes were Ben Cabrera, Jaime de Guzman, Angelito Antonio, and Danilo Dalena. Ben Cabrera, using old photographs for visual reference, produced prints on the interlinked themes of national identity and anti-imperialism. In his explorations of the Filipino identity, he used nineteenth century individual and group portraits to elicit a sympathetic affinity and identification with Filipinos a century past, thus effecting a psychological continuity between present-day Filipinos and their ancestors in the Spanish Colonial Period in their ideals and aspirations to be a free and sovereign people. In his series *Bandit and Gentleman*, he purported to show the two aspects of the Filipino under military rule: as "bandit", which was the blanket derogatory term used by the military authorities for rebel, and as gentleman or middle-class *ilustrado*, and sought to juxtapose or even fuse these two aspects through montage techniques into one identity. Jaime de Guzman also used the historical theme to create a resonance with contemporary political events. He particularly used the Gomburza as a striking central theme to signify the persecution of nationalists. His *Gomburza* series and the later *Metamorphosis I and II* which moved towards abstraction were inspired by the theme which contains allusions to the Crucifixion. These works, which show the influence of the artist's tutelage under the Mexican Siqueiros, are in the large-scale mural format, with energetic gestural brushwork conveying the surge of patriotic ardor, with the dramatic use of reds, blues, and blacks to express bloody struggle. Angelito Antonio did some works in the expressionistic vein on the theme of police brutality alluding to the street demonstrations, as well as images of the poor

and oppressed, but these were later to be superseded by his numerous folk genre paintings. In the media, Danilo Dalena set new standards for the editorial cartoon by his brilliant illustrations of socio-political issues in the *Free Press* and the *Asia-Philippines Leader*.

The Seventies opened in the midst of a fervid political atmosphere which erupted in the First Quarter Storm of January to March 1970. In spite of the crackdown on militant youth, many visual artists banded together to form the *Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista at Arkitekto '71*. With the aim of reaching and serving the masses, they held workshops in depressed areas such as Tondo. Large numbers left the city for the countryside for exposure to the day-to-day reality of the peasants. Artists developed popular forms such as cartoons, comics, and illustrations for people's publications. Numbers of city-bred students settled in the rural areas from Cagayan Valley in the North to Davao in the South where they engaged in interacting with and politicizing the peasants. The artists who remained in the city turned away from the galleries, except for a few, such as the Red Gallery in Cubao where a group did an interaction mural depicting the classes of Philippine society in struggle. They looked for alternative venues for their work which were mostly murals; they exhibited in public places, such as the historic Plaza Miranda in Quiapo, as well as in churches and schools, or in travelling exhibits.

A strong influence on the political art of the period came from the socialist realism of China in its reconstruction period, especially in posters showing the power of the masses in militant and dynamic stances. The *Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista at Arkitekto '71* observed a number of working principles: art-making as a collective activity from the conceptualization to the execution of the work, the practice of group study, criticism and self-criticism with respect to the artist's work and working relationships; the use of artistic references and models, the study of the theory of political art from the People's Republic of China; the observance of clarity of form and content in figurative expression. A large part of the visual works produced by the *Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista at Arkitekto '71* was intended to answer the immediate needs of propaganda with respect to particular topical issues, thus assu-

ming a journalistic function, as in photojournalism. The works are mostly illustrative, but possessing a sufficient degree of technical competence to convey the message effectively. Thus, the artists created an art meant to awaken the socio-political consciousness of the large public and to inspire revolutionary fervor in its role as agent of change.

On September 21, 1972, President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law through P.D. 1081 "to save democracy in the Philippines." This was accompanied by widespread arrests, crackdown in the universities, and the closure of all publications, newspapers and magazines. Overnight, the walls were emblazoned with militant protest slogans which were whitewashed by brigades by day and clandestinely restored at night. The period saw an exodus of political students to the countryside to do mass work, while a significant number who had escaped imprisonment put up mass publications. To adapt to the new conditions, the *Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista at Arkitekto '72* was founded. While the first phase of the organization in 1971 produced mostly paintings, the artists of the second phase concentrated on making posters for a graphic and immediate visual effect, drawing cartoons and comics for people's publications, and producing graffiti (*peryodikit*) to be pasted on walls with lightning speed.

It was also in 1977 that a group of young and talented artists banded together to form the *Kaisahan* which asserted the role of art as an agent of social change and as an instrument for liberation. This group spearheaded the movement for socially committed art which was to be called by the term "social realism". From its inception, through a period of several years, the *Kaisahan* members enjoyed the sponsorship of the Center for the Advancement of Young Artists (CAYA) which sheltered many young painters of varied orientation under the management of Mrs. Jinky Morales in its office on the ground floor of the Sunvar Condominium in Buendia, Makati. The original members of the *Kaisahan* in the order of seniority were Pablo Baens Santos, Jesus Abrera, Edgar Fernandez, Antipas Delotavo, Renato Habulan, Papo de Asis, Vin Toledo, Albert Jimenez, Joe Cuaresma, and Charles Funk with the participation of Al Manrique, Heber Bartolome, and Neil Doloricon. The CAYA as an active center sponsored lectures on the different

aspects of art, including techniques, materials, history, theory, by artists and critics; conducted workshops, and organized out-of-town exposure trips to the cultural communities in Banawe, Mindoro, and Palawan which culminated in the *Lunduyan* exhibit; put up one-man shows of its members and numerous group shows, such as *Hayuma* in which the painters interacted with the poets of the *Galian sa Arte at Tula* in a painting-poetry exhibit. Even when the CAYA closed in 1979, the *Kaisahan* group continued to be active while the rest of the artists dispersed.

The early Eighties, with heightening repression along with the economic crisis, have shown an upswing in social realist art. Many of the original social realists have developed their art consistently and have been joined by other artists of talent. This book will deal primarily with the nine artists who have constituted the core of the movement.



KAISAHAN INTERACTION MURAL 1977

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ART AND SOCIETY: THE AESTHETICS OF
COMMITTED ART

The origins of art in the primitive communal societies through the early chiefdoms show the clear relationship of artistic expression with social life. The cave paintings on the walls of Lascaux in France and Altamira in Spain attest to man's earliest efforts to affect and control nature and the circumstances of his hunting activities through sympathetic magic. Even in our day, our native shamans, the *babaylan* as folk bards and healers, are intermediaries between man and the gods through ritualistic dance, chant, and music to seek propitious conditions of nature for the fertility of land, river and all useful creatures, including man himself, and thus to assure the survival of the tribe and community. The original and natural condition of art is for it to thrive like a plant drawing sustenance and vitality from the ground in which it grows. Being a specialized form of human communication, art cut off from the rich resources of its society and historical epoch can only be cultivated under the most fragile and precarious hothouse conditions, always in danger of withering for lack of nourishment.

Nonetheless, there have been points in the history of art when artists sought to cut off their art from the life and issues of their time in quest of the illusory ideal of a "pure art". In the late nineteenth century in Europe, this took the form of the "art for art's sake" theory which a number of later artists and aestheticians espoused and developed. It is necessary, however, to guard against thinking that there exist, in general, two points of view in opposition: art which recognizes its social roots versus art for art's sake. To show these as equal and competing trends would betray a lack of perspective, for, in fact, the history of art shows the latter tendency as being of a confined and limited occurrence deviating from the general flow of art drawing its impulses from the dynamics of society and history. Even impressionism, with its technical preoccupation with the effects of light was, as Arnold Hauser pointed out, an art of twentieth century imagery and responses, sensitive as it was to the social

and environmental changes wrought by developments in science and industry. The modernist styles were not in themselves devoid of social meaning. The art of the expressionists Munch and Kirchner expressed their intense emotional reactions to the distortions of humanity in a militarized setting. Moreover, it is necessary to situate the theory of "art for art's sake" within a historical perspective. For art as a form of knowledge can never be context-free. It is always perspectival and "produced in specific contingent institutional contexts."¹ Art, as well as aesthetic theory, is always historically situated.

The theory of "art for art's sake," also known by the term "aestheticism," posits the doctrine of the absolute autonomy of art which should thus be stripped of the "impurities" of a moral, religious, political, or social order. Theophile Gautier of the Parnassian school of French poetry, declared that art to be truly beautiful must serve no end outside itself, or that art "may not serve any other values than the aesthetic without damaging its aesthetic value."² The French Symbolists from Baudelaire to Mallarmé likewise laid deliberate emphasis on aesthetic value, although Baudelaire decried "the childish utopianism of the school of art for art's sake in ruling out morals."³ To the Goncourt brothers is attributed the statement that "painting exists to delight the eye and the senses and not to aspire too much beyond the recreation of the optic nerve."⁴ In England, the counterparts of the French Symbolists called the Aesthetes or the Decadents, including Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, made "art for art's sake" their catchword.

Plekhanov in his monograph on *Art and Social Life* delineates the historical context of aestheticism and advances the theory that "the belief in art for art's sake arises whenever the artist is at odds with his social environment."⁵ It is, in fact, a response symptomatic of alienation. The French romanticists and the Parnassians, by such a position, signified their resistance to absorption into the bourgeois value system which then expected poetry and painting to serve narrow bourgeois morality. In their lifestyle, they deliberately cultivated the artificial pose, the effete gesture, and dandyism to distance themselves further from bourgeois society. Seen in this light, Gautier's violent reaction becomes understandable: "No, you fools, no, you

goitrous cretins, a book cannot be turned into gelatine soup, nor a novel into a pair of seamless boots. . . . By the intestines of all the Popes, future, past and present: No, and a thousand times no! . . . I am one of those who consider the superfluous essential; my love of things and people is in inverse proportion to the services they may render."⁶ Who then were these bourgeois who elicited such a severe diatribe? Theodore Banville, likewise sharing the same hatred of the bourgeois defined the term as referring to "a man whose only god was the five-franc piece, who had no ideal but saving his own skin, and who, in poetry, loved sentimental romance, and in the plastic arts, lithography."⁷ So wide had the chasm grown between the artist and society that the hero Axel in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's novel, commits suicide with his lady-love as the culmination of an emotionally charged discourse rejecting all connections with bourgeois society in their final cry: "Let our servants do the living for us!" — truly the tragic conclusion of ivory tower aesthetics.

An important aspect of this turning away of the nineteenth century artist from his society to take refuge in solipsism had to do with the revulsion on the part of the artistic sensibility to the overwhelming commercialization of his environment. The artist had become alienated from his art now reduced to a commodity obeying the laws of the marketplace — an alienation which results in the fragmentation of his personality, with art losing its force as meaningful expression. The artists thus counterposed art for art's sake against art for money's sake in the bourgeois system. Marx, in the *Poverty of Philosophy* traces the historical process which has led to this condition in our time: "There was a time, as in the Middle Ages, when only the superfluous, the excess of production over consumption, was exchanged. There was again a time, when not only the superfluous, but all products, all industrial existence, had passed into commerce, when the whole of production depended on exchange . . . Finally, there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought — virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc. — when everything, in

short, passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value." Yet, it is important to note that while the Parnassians and the Symbolists, in reaction to the venality of their social environment, took refuge in the ivory tower of aestheticism, they served the interests of that reviled society in the long run by denying to art its potency as a revolutionary weapon and agent of change. As Plekhanov points out: "But while revolting against the vulgarity of their social environment, the romantics, the Parnassians, and the realists had no objection to the social relationships in which this vulgarity was rooted. On the contrary, although they cursed the 'bourgeois', they treasured the bourgeois system — first instinctively, then quite consciously. And the stronger the movement for liberation from the bourgeois system became in modern Europe, the more conscious was the attachment of the French believers in art for art's sake to this system. And the more conscious their attachment to this system became, the less were they able to remain indifferent to the idea-content of their production."⁸

Late nineteenth century ivory-tower aestheticism was assailed from various quarters, from William Morris' Arts and Crafts Movement which sought the unity of art and life, from John Ruskin who, despite his enthusiastic worship of beauty, refused to espouse an art which was out of touch with common life, as well as from Tolstoy who objected to the divorce of the fine arts from moral standards and the common man. While aestheticism, with the exaggerated one-sidedness of its doctrine that art may have no moral, religious, political, or social import, barely survived the turn of the century, still the art for art's sake theory was later revived in various forms especially during periods of crisis. Traditional bourgeois aesthetics had indeed favored the alienation of the artist from his social and historical circumstances in order to anesthetize art and remove from it its potency as an instrument for revolutionary change, at the same time to assure the continuity of the large bourgeois art market which at its lowest common denominator demands an art which is little else than decorative commodity catering to market values.

Contemporary philosophical support of "pure art" is implied in Edmund Husserl's method of "phenomenological reduction" which involves the elimination of historical, cultural, and social factors in the quest for truth. Commenting on Husserl, Zygmunt Bauman writes: "If one wishes to grasp the truth in its eternal purity and radically cleanse it of all and any corruption, one has to get rid of history, culture, society. But one cannot do it radically enough unless one gets rid first of their creation, the empirical individual . . . What is not intended is this sickly emaciation of whatever would be left when — and if — the empirical were 'bracketed away.' Is anything left at all? And if something is, is it dense and resourceful enough to support true knowledge and true understanding? Indeed, any understanding at all?"⁹ This "eternal truth" can only be grasped by "pure consciousness" arrived at through the operation of "phenomenological reduction" which is defined as the effort "to peel away successive layers of content to arrive at the end at the tough nucleus"¹⁰ — if such indeed exists. Art being a form of knowledge, would not the quest for "pure art" involve such a reductive process which can only end in futility?

There are other variations of the art for art's sake theory, advocates of which would later be grouped as isolationists, among them Benedetto Croce who sought to separate art from human activities and Clive Bell who advanced the theory of Significant Form and whose formalist aesthetics can be summed up in his statement that "to create and appreciate the greatest art the most absolute abstraction from the affairs of life is essential" as against the contextualists including Tolstoy, Dewey, Goldmann and Mumford who stressed the continual interaction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic values. Proponents of "pure art" like to use as argument the sentimental didacticism of nineteenth century European academic painting, the cloying moralistic genre works that upheld provincial pieties, the fascist paintings of the Third Reich which exhausted the repertoire of histrionic gesture, or the academism of Russian post-revolutionary paintings which glorified tractors. Through all these debates in art history, there emerges the indubitable fact that the greatest moments of art were attained with the fusion of high artistic form and human liberative meaning. Francisco Goya is primarily remembered for his *Tres de Mayo*

1808 and for his great print folios, *Los Caprichos* and *The Disasters of War*, powerful indictments of Napoleon's Spanish ambitions. Delacroix is best remembered for *Liberty Guiding the People* and for his paintings which rallied to the cause of Greek independence from the Turks, such as the *Massacre of Chios* and *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi*. Picasso's *Guernica* recalls for all time the moral outrage at the Fascist aerial bombardment of a small Basque village, and by extension, at the brutal suppression of the people's struggle by fascist regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

While numerous artists and scholars may still be caught in the debate between art of social import and art for art's sake, H. Bénac unequivocally posits the "utility" of art and the necessity for the artist to recognize his social role. Art, he says, is useful in contributing to the development of culture, in influencing morality by fostering self-awareness, and in changing society, as in art engagé. To the question why the artist must recognize his social role, Bénac affirms that the artist is a responsible being in the context of his time and place, as all men are. Furthermore, as visionary, the artist is able to give striking and enduring form to ideas which would otherwise be inchoate and formless. It is, in fact, a necessity for him to assume his social responsibility; otherwise, by alienating himself from his society and his time, his art would fall into artifice and formalism which lead to pure play with form or to artistic nihilism.¹¹

It is possible that while art for art's sake may have lost much of its steam in the West which generally takes the social basis of art as a matter of fact, the struggle still vividly persists in colonies and countries with a recent history of colonialism. For the formalistic attitude may form part of the lingering value apparatus supporting the interests of the colonial or neo-colonial power which will, by various means overt or covert, and often with local collusion, undermine the revolutionary potency of art in these countries. That such a doctrine is linked to class interests has been pointed out by a number of writers. Janet Wolff, for instance, perceives the contradiction within traditional bourgeois aesthetics which "hypostatise universal, trans-historical or metaphysical features of art," while those "purported universal characteristics turn out on close critical scrutiny to be nothing more than the values of a particular dominant, or

strategically located, group in society, able to project these as absolute and impartial." In support, Bourdieu, as cited by Wolff, points out: "The very possibility of the aesthetic disposition as 'disinterested' and separated from practical concerns depends on the privileged conditions of existence of the dominant class which secures its 'objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies by suspending or removing economic necessity' ". And again, according to Bourdieu, "the 'pure' disposition which is accepted as universally legitimate" or as an aesthetic choice in opposition to social art, "is both class-bound and the object of struggle between classes; it is used as a strategy of exclusion and 'distinction' by members of a higher class against those below them."¹²

As an important element of culture in the superstructure, art has been defined as "a form of man's aesthetic apprehension of reality, thus as a form of man's active, practical, and energetic relationship to the world around him," at the same time that it is "a specific type of thinking, as artistic cognition of the world, as a complex and distinctive form of social consciousness, as ideology." Art is also defined as "a means by which society achieves social self-consciousness because it mirrors the different class standpoints in conflict." Scholars such as Arnold Hauser and Janet Wolff have emphasized the perspectival nature of art. It is the vision of reality reflecting a standpoint that gives unity to a work. Whether a work is pure commodity catering to market demands, whether it asserts formalistic values as absolute in the rejection of reality, or whether it deals with socio-political themes, it always represents a perspective, a world view pertaining to a particular interacting and living consciousness shaped by its social being.

Asian scholar Vinayak Purohit identifies three "moments or aspects in dynamic motion" in art as artifact and product of labor: Commodity, Technology, Ideology. While all modes of creative expression are simultaneously technological and ideologized expressions, works of art also enter the commodity market as technologized products of labor, and, as ideological vehicles, portray commodity relations. "Those that own the processes of commodity production, also own and dominate technological output and ideologized expressions." Because of commercialism and the greed for profit, "commodity seeks to domi-

nate creative forces in both their technological and art dimensions."¹³ As technologies are geared to serve the interests of the First World, so is art shaped as commodity to serve the market of dealers, agents, collectors, and art investors by encouraging and rewarding marketable qualities, i.e. confining the potentialities of art within the prevailing norms and fashions of the visually pleasing, at the same time restricting innovation and limiting intellectual content and meaning within the confines of prevailing institutions.

Ideology, however, is not as apparent as the technological and commodity aspects of art. While the artist may claim spontaneity, unconsciousness or ecstasy and deny ideological meaning in his work, the artist is nevertheless formed by history and his particular social circumstance. And whether conscious of it or not, the artist cannot express himself except "through an ideology, in reaction to an ideology, and in conformity or in rebellion against an ideology." In this sense, it is perfectly valid to conclude that all art is political, whether overtly or covertly, open or veiled, direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious, because it has the coherence of a class standpoint that integrates meanings and values. To quote Hauser, "art can express social aims in two different ways. Its social content can be clothed in the form of explicit avowal — confessions of belief, express doctrines, direct propaganda — or in that of mere implication, that is, in terms of the outlook tacitly presupposed in works which seem devoid of social reference."¹⁴ It is a fact that "nakedly tendentious art often repels where veiled ideology encounters no resistance." Frankly partisan art is often labeled with the term "propaganda," which has accumulated strong negative connotations. For one, the term is often employed by formalists who are averse to social meaning in art especially when it contains a threat to their positions of privilege. Works of a direct social message, such as in posters and murals fulfill an immediate hortatory function as they relate to topical issues in the manner of visual journalism. But even agitprop works to be effective need to meet a minimum standard of technical competence.

Art as a form of knowledge is always produced from the perspective of a specific historical and social situation: artist and viewer both experience art within a particular context.

Knowledge, moreover, is always value-laden and affects man's relationship with nature, his fellowmen, and the universe as a whole, because it is concerned with the understanding of reality. As a form of knowledge, art is necessarily related to the other disciplines, such as philosophy and the social sciences because reality must be perceived as a totality. Lukacs identifies the role of art as representing a totalizing vision in a fragmented society, as against the artificial segregation of disciplines in a sterile academic overspecialization which prevents one from arriving at a total encompassing view of reality. When art is the product of overspecialization as a purely technical practice, if not as a self-indulgent pastime, it results in artifact-commodities, rather than the living and life-enhancing expression that it is and should be.

At the same time, art has historically evolved the discipline of aesthetics, a category distinct from other disciplines. Aesthetics has to do with theory of form, i.e., in the visual arts, the elements of line, value, color, shape, texture, and composition, and how these function as elements of artistic expression. In other words, aesthetics deals with the "conventions of artistic representation which mediate ideology in aesthetic form" as it also deals with philosophical issues regarding the nature of art and its relation to reality. This then constitutes the "specificity of art" which thus gives it a relative autonomy as it is defined as a particular discipline distinguishable from sociology, politics, religion, etc.

Wolff defines the specificity of art as practice, with its own internal forms, relations, and structures. This is likewise what Hauser refers to when he writes of art as having "an inner logic of its own" as seen in "the internal structural relations of the various levels of organization and the various motifs distinguishable in it." Thus, "the experience and evaluation of art are socially and ideologically situated and constructed, and at the same time irreducible to the social or the ideological." There is, however, no conflict between these premises, for while art has its specificity as a discipline, the content, indeed ideology, that it expresses reveals its socio-political and historical coordinates. Then, too, while art is historically situated, its human significance and aesthetic value may transcend the period in which it was produced.

In the context of the Third World, the relationship between art and politics was elaborated on by Mao Tse-Tung in his talks on the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art in May 1942. His contribution to the theory is marked by the richness of experience and *praxis* in the course of his people's struggle against the traditional feudal lords and the imperialist forces that were plundering the country. The role of literature and art in social transformation is recognized: "Life is reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." The first problem raised is: Literature and art for whom? For the large masses and their needs in the practical struggle — the workers, peasants, armed partisans, and the urban petty bourgeoisie including the petty bourgeois intellectuals. Popularization in works which meet their needs and as easy to absorb was seen as the more urgent task in their stage of the revolution. However, since the cultural level of the masses was seen to steadily rise with the increasing demand for higher standards, the raising of standards in the progressive direction in which the masses are going was likewise called for. As regards the traditional forms, Mao Tse-tung advocated that they be used but infused with new content. Foreign works, even though they are the works of the feudal or bourgeois classes are to be studied for what can be learned from them, although uncritical transplantation is to be rejected. While distinguishing political from artistic criteria, he demanded "the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form." He continued: "Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically. Therefore we oppose both works of art with a wrong political viewpoint and the tendency towards the 'poster and slogan style' which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power."¹⁵ Finally, the artist who adopts the standpoint of the masses must himself integrate with the masses so that his art will be enriched in the experience of the people's struggle and will thus truly contribute towards their liberation.

3

REALISM AND SOCIAL REALISM

Political art, in general, or in its more consistent form of committed art, has expressed itself in a variety of styles. However, political art in many countries, such as the United States, Mexico, and now here in the Philippines, especially when it is produced by a more or less cohesive group working within an organizational framework, is often called by the term "social realism."

In fact, social realism is an offshoot of realism which crystallized as a school in the group of Courbet (1819-77), Daumier (1808-79), and Millet (1814-75), French artists who were conscious of forming a new school with its peak period of activity from around 1840 to 1880. As Nochlin defined it, the aim of realism was "to give a truthful, objective, and impartial representation of the real world based on meticulous observation of contemporary life."¹⁶ Coming after the romantic movement, realism sought to break through the isolation and individualism of the artist and resituate him in his concrete and contemporary milieu. Courbet's dictum, *faire de l'art vivant* (to create a living art) and Daumier's motto *Il faut être de son temps* both express this aim. The term realism assumed the tone of a battle cry when the French writer Champfleury, on the occasion of the exhibition of Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* in 1850 declared: "From now on, the critics must decide for or against realism." In 1851 Courbet strongly expressed his political stand when he declared: "I am not only a socialist, but also a democrat and a republican, in a word, a partisan of revolution and above all, a realist, that is, the sincere friend of the real truth."

Gustave Courbet's political ideas were largely influenced by his close friend, the social philosopher Proudhon, who in turn owed much of his thinking to Fourier. At that time the intellectual currents in France were Positivism in the philosophy of Auguste Comte, Scientism of Renan, Anarchism of Proudhon, and Socialism of Fourier. It was in the 1830s that the word "socialism" was coined independently in both England and France. Critic Linda Nochlin identifies Fourierist inspiration in Courbet's big painting, *"The Studio"* (1855) interpreted as an allegory of the association of Capital, Labor, and Talent,

according to Fourierist ideals and doctrine. This work, rejected by the Salon, was exhibited by Courbet at the *Pavillion du Realisme* which he set up at his own expense at the Paris World Fair in 1855. Marx himself wrote the famous manifesto in 1848 during his short sojourns in Brussels and in Paris, after which he settled in London where he stayed from 1849 to his death in 1883, while his voluminous work on *Capital* first appeared in 1867. Marx disagreed with Proudhon on the latter's rejection of revolutionary action and on his conservative defense of tradition. On the fall of the Paris Commune in 1870, Marx wrote an article regarding its implications for the future. Certainly a great source of inspiration for the artists of the time was the French Revolution of 1789 which vitalized a new current of democratic and libertarian ideals that would change the face of Europe and the world.

The precursors of the Realists were the painters of the Barbizon School, among them Theodore Rousseau and Camille Corot, who preferred painting out of doors before the empirical evidence of nature rather than doing studio landscapes according to formula, as had been the practice of the neo-classical artists. The Barbizon artists applied themselves to the analysis of reality with a regard marked by sincerity and restrained lyricism, as they also renounced the picturesque, the anecdotal interpretation of nature, as well as the emotional heightening of the scene.

The Realists themselves approached nature and reality with an objective attitude which they derived from science then rapidly expanding through discoveries in medicine (Claude Bernard) and human evolution and genetics (Darwin).

Realism brought down upon itself the ire of the Academy and all official influential parties by breaking down the classical ideal of beauty (*kalokagathia*) based on ideal measurements and proportions and on emotional detachment and restraint. It also broke down the hierarchies of subject matter which until then prevailed in the European academies. While the academies placed highest importance on historical painting, with subjects drawn from classical antiquity portrayed with rhetorical flourish, the realists sought to democratize painting and sculpture by overcoming traditional and establishment prejudices and by ran-

ging over a larger field of subject matter in which peasants and workers including stonebreakers, laundresses, miners, railway workers, rag pickers were given a new status as principal subjects of art. Along with the democratization of art was the development of popular forms such as the lithograph. Daumier himself made thousands of lithographs, social satires of the bourgeoisie for the publications of his day. Many anonymous lithographs pictured the reality of the 1848 revolution and the Paris barricades.

In landscapes, the realists no longer sought the distant, exotic or uncommonly beautiful scenery which inspired the romantics, but they focused on their daily and familiar environment as worthy subject of art. As Courbet declared in 1891: "Painting is an essentially *concrete* art and can only consist of the presentation of *real and existing things*. It is a completely physical language, the words consist of all visible objects; an object which is *abstract*, not visible, non-existent, is not within the realm of painting." The insistence on the freshness of vision also meant the rejection of classical schema of representation based on ideal measurements and proportions which had always guided the artist's way of seeing and directed it along well-trodden paths.

The realists, too, had a strong sense of history, not so much of antiquity and of the past, but of history in the making, as unfolding in contemporary events, thus giving art a historical dimension. The artists felt that they were in the midst of the historical process, not only as observers, but even more, as participants in the struggle for democratic ideals. History to them was not frozen into grand tableaux, but was a dynamic and open-ended process. They were keen observers of their epoch; each moment was viewed with fresh sensitivity and insight. People in their specific setting were observed in all their particularizing and concrete documentary detail, including casual, random elements in which one moment slips into the next.

Historically, the period of peak activity of the realists which was from 1840 to 1880 is to be viewed against a background of intense social and political ferment in France. This was the period which saw the struggle between the new forces of republicanism and the traditional forces of reaction alterna-

ting in strength until the final defeat of the monarchy with the end of the Second Empire and the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870. The French Revolution in 1789 with the historic events of the storming of the Bastille and the execution of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette was only the first phase of the long struggle. The republican ideals of the people were subsequently betrayed by the opportunist Napoleon who crowned himself Emperor of the French in 1804 and set about to begin an imperialist campaign overrunning Europe until he was checked by Metternich and the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

Following the Napoleonic debacle was the period of the Restoration in which the monarchy in the person of Louis XVIII, brother of Louis XVI, was installed as king. His parliamentary concessions though limited displeased Charles X who took over in 1824 and worked to restore the full force of royal authoritarianism. This development was answered by the Revolution of 1830 in which the liberals rose against the king who was eventually replaced by Louis-Philippe in what was called the July Monarchy (*Monarchie de Juillet*) who took the middle ground between liberalism and reaction. Again, in 1848, the people rose in revolt and established a socialist republic in which labor was raised as a major issue. In 1849, Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, seized power and in 1852 staged a *coup d'état* proclaiming himself Napoleon III of the Second Empire, thus betraying once more the republican ideals. He conducted an adventurous foreign policy in which France went to war with Bismarck's Prussia, and suffered defeat in 1871. Meanwhile, the working classes of Paris rose up in revolt in the famous Paris Commune which was brutally suppressed to give way to the conservative Third Republic which secured the power of bourgeoisie to the disillusionment of the working class and progressive intellectuals. Arnold Hauser in this connection writes that while "it is true that the Commune ends with a more complete defeat for the rebels than any previous revolution . . . it is the first to be sustained by an international labor movement and to be followed by a victory for the bourgeoisie associated with a feeling of acute danger."¹⁷ Marx himself, upon the fall of the Paris Commune in 1870 wrote about it in the most moving terms in a separate pamphlet, *The Civil War in France* in order to instruct the revolutionaries of

the future, interested as he was in long-term perspectives rather than short-term gains. It is against this lively background that one should view the key works of the realists: Courbet's *Stone-breakers*, 1849; *Burial at Ornans*, 1849; *The Studio*, 1855; Daumier's *Rue Transnonain le 15 avril 1834*, 1834; *Third Class Carriage*, c. 1856; and Millet's *Angelus*, 1858-9; *The Gleaners*, 1857, and *Man with the Hoe*, 1859-62.

Realism, which in the French school was associated with socialist aspirations, raised certain internal contradictions which sought a resolution. One of these proceeded from the scientific spirit of "objectivity" and detachment with which it purported to view reality with truth and honesty. The premium placed on empirical evidence as it presented itself to the senses implied in itself the abstention or withholding of critical and moral comment. How was this then to be reconciled with the social and republican ideals of the artists (Courbet himself participated actively as a communard in the events of his time)? To this, Linda Nochlin points out that "although the Realist refrained from moral comment in his work, his whole attitude towards art implied a moral commitment to the value of truth, honesty, and sincerity."¹⁸ Viewed in the historical context of the republican struggle of 1848, realism, Hauser points out, as an art that described reality without bias and without restraint, could only be but revolutionary. Moreover, the treatment of subject matter which insisted on the concrete and the specific data of contemporary life, unidealized and unromanticized, as in Daumier's *Rue Transnonain*, and which focused on the hitherto ignored figures of the peasant and the worker was itself the expression of an ideological position. Then, too, while the detached point of view may be perceived in such a work as Courbet's *Stone-breakers*, it nevertheless created the first serious and sympathetic image of labor. Millet endowed the monumental figures of his peasants with a noble dignity as in *The Gleaners*, while his *Man with the Hoe* is a protest against class exploitation, and, of course, Daumier, no less a realist, was the powerful political satirist of the hypocritical and pompous bourgeoisie of the Second Empire.

Reacting to the idea of material and empirical evidence as the proper subject of realism, Ernst Fischer takes issue with the content and range of reality as these artists defined and delimit-

ed it. He objects to the reduction of reality to "a purely exterior world existing independently from our consciousness" which the artist confronts and paints objectively and dispassionately. On the contrary, Fischer points out that "reality includes all the immense variety of interactions in which man, with his capacity for expression and comprehension, can be involved" and that the artist is "not merely the accessory of a sensory organ apprehending the outside world, he is also a man who belongs to a particular age, class, nation, he possesses a particular temperament and character . . ." Fischer thus extends the original realist definition of reality by declaring that "the whole of reality is the sum of all the relationships between subject and object, not only past but also future, not only events, but also subjective experiences, dreams, forebodings, emotions, fantasies."¹⁹ A work of art unites reality with the imagination. But even these, however are part of man's consciousness, and as such bear a class orientation.

In his extended definition of the subject of realism, Fischer introduces the idea of potentiality and of the future in what was originally limited to the contemporaneous present. E.J. Hobsbawm, situating realism in the historical context of mid-nineteenth century realities of poverty and exploitation, perceives the limitation of the subject of realism and points out that reality is, after all, not static but continually evolving and changing because of the dynamic struggle of forces. He asks: "Was it not realism to represent, not the necessarily imperfect present, but the better situation to which man aspired and which was already, surely being created? Art had a future dimension . . ." In China, Mao Tse Tung, realizing the importance of this element, coined the term "revolutionary romanticism" to refer in art to the leap into the revolutionary future in the spirit of hope and optimism. For, in fact, it is precisely in its implication of a free, just, and human society of the future attainable through struggle that realism can escape being coopted into bourgeois respectability.

Realism is often mentioned in the same breath, if not used interchangeably with "representational" or "figurative art." The latter term which arose in contradistinction to "abstract" and "non-figurative" or "non-objective" is the broader term because it includes all painting or sculpture which make direct referen-

ces to objective reality; in other words, all works in which the subject is recognizable as derived from the outside world. Representational art thus includes stylistic distortion. Realism, in the strict sense, is an objective approach to reality and thus precludes emotional distortion or design stylization. Realism is also often confused with "naturalism." Realism may extend into naturalism when realistic verisimilitude becomes *trompe l'oeil* or illusionism. E.J. Hobsbawm writes that realism turns into naturalism or *verismo* if it emphasizes the inclusion of all aspects of reality, including, or more particularly, the unpleasant or dangerous, which would thus imply a conscious political critique of bourgeois society. Arnold Hauser in his *Social History of Art* pursues this distinction between realism and naturalism. However, he avoids any categorical distinctions between the two, since he recognizes their boundaries as fluid. Instead, he sees the expediency of calling the artistic movement under discussion naturalism and reserving the concept of realism for the philosophy opposed to romanticism or idealism.

What has happened, however, is that the term "realism" has largely remained in the visual arts as an art historical term associated with the School of Courbet of the 1850s which consciously employed the term to describe its art. At the same time, realism is also generally applied to literary works which opt for realist subject matter and social documentation as opposed to romantic adventures, purely imaginary or idealized fiction. Naturalism, on the other hand, is a literary school of the 1880s, the most prominent members of which were Zola and Maupassant in France. Theoretically, naturalism brings to the realist passion for social documentation a definite scientific orientation primarily derived from Taine's philosophy that physiological conditions (race), environmental influence (milieu), and historical circumstance (moment) are the determinants of the human personality. To demonstrate this determinism, Zola chose his subjects from the masses and spared no detail of their grime, squalor, and despair. Subsequently Zola's research into the working classes led to a realization of the injustice of the social system, and thus to his espousal of socialism as he engaged himself in the issues of the day.

If Realism, however, was a coherent movement in the mid-nineteenth century in France, how then is one to situate the

realistic accuracy and verisimilitude of such earlier artists as Van Eyck, Velasquez, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer, and the lesser masters of the Dutch seventeenth century, certainly no less realists in their incisive perception of living detail? To this one may answer that the French 19th century realists brought to their art a definite socio-political dimension lent by the valuable historical experience of the republican struggle. Their aim to democratize art by portraying the working classes is best viewed in the perspective of the socialist ideas that then vigorously activated the historical process in the several phases of the conflict. It is possible to say that it was in the work of the French Realists that the basic social classes were first taken seriously in art and represented in the spirit of sympathy, even homage, to their social role. The Realists who lived through the Revolution of 1848 were keenly aware of labor as an issue, of the struggle to be waged by the proletariat. Proudhon, an influential thinker, already spoke of industrial organization and the guaranty of work and wages, although Marx castigated him for rejecting the strike as a weapon of labor and for opposing revolutionary action.

In contrast, Breuwer or Jan Steen, Dutch *petits maitres* of the 17th century who did peasant genre, were interested only in bringing out the comic and picturesque in the subjects of their paintings in which the rural masses are shown as carousing, quarelling uproariously, or awkwardly sprawled in drunken stupor. These artists, of course, did not have the historical experience of struggle in the nineteenth century with the rise of the proletariat in industry nor the climate of a heightened socio-political consciousness. Moreover, while the 17th century realist works were produced under the patronage of the Church as part of the religious propaganda of the Counter-Reformation or under the patronage of the prosperous bourgeoisie who sought artistic testimonies to their ascendant status, the realist works of the nineteenth century constituted an art of the opposition, and as such brought upon them the hostility of the Academy and the Establishment.

The bourgeoisie, which had suppressed the uprisings, viewed Realism with a sense of threat. Realist paintings which were rejected by the Academy, sought to view reality anew, freed from the traditional baggage of subject matter and form.

In contrast, the earlier works of realism in Italy and the Netherlands followed the conventions of subject matter largely set down by the Church and the bourgeoisie as art patrons. Thus, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Jan Steen and others of their period created their art within the repertoire of religious and folk genre subjects and within the baroque style with its concern for chiaroscuro and tonal effects, its textural interest, its diagonal and open composition, in a way that their realist approach was ordered by these stylistic period concerns. Realism was the first movement which thus sought to free art from its bourgeois moorings and, within its socialist orientation, pursue a fresh vision of reality.

From France, Realism spread to other countries along with the socio-political ideas that inspired it. The devastating famines of Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century were the subject of Walter Doverell's *Irish Beggars* and the paintings of Watts, while working-class exploitation was graphically portrayed in H. von Herkomer's memorable painting, *On Strike*. The English artist, Ford Madox Brown, in his painting, *Work* portrayed the heroism of labor. In Munich, Germany, the Secessionists who resigned from the official artists' association held an exhibit in 1893 including the works of Courbet, Millet, and Corot. These dissenting artists who formed the *Sezessionstil* are best represented by William Leibl who had met Courbet and who espoused realism with his studies of Bavarian peasants.

Realism as a school was followed in France by impressionism which borrowed from it its spirit of scientific objectivity and its preference for contemporary subjects. The scientific attitude, however, was applied not so much to social reality as to the visual perception of the phenomena of light and color. The impressionist view of reality was also further given shape by the philosophy of Bergson who viewed reality as a flux or flowing stream.

Political content, however, was not absent in the succeeding modernist styles which sprang up in the years preceding and following the First World War and the later historical developments up to the Second World War. Expressionism at its inception was permeated by strong anti-bourgeois sentiments. This highly emotional style which marked German painting and

graphic arts from 1905 to 1919 was said to be the "revelation of the profoundly problematic condition of Europe at the turn of the century". Convinced of the bankruptcy of bourgeois society, the expressionists saw the importance of communal action to bring about change, and with Nietzsche and Marx as heroes, "to take art out on to the streets and undertake cultural cavalry charges against the entrenched and indiscriminating middle classes." The very titles of the Expressionist broadsheets attest to their militancy: *The Cry*, *The Storm*, *The Torch*, and *The Action*. Max Pechstein who joined the Brücke in 1906 wrote that "art is not a game, but has a responsibility towards the people. Art is a public affair." Not all expressionists, however, were imbued with political consciousness; most of the later *Blaue Reiter* group, such as Franz Marc, Klee, and Kandinsky were of a metaphysical bent and pursued the expression of the "inner world" into abstraction.

It was, however, after the First World War that a number of artists effectively applied the expressionist style to issues of immediate social relevance. These were George Grosz (1893-1959) who bitinglly satirized the bourgeois capitalist and the military; Otto Dix (b. 1891) who took for his subjects beggars, prostitutes and social outcasts, victims of the war, and Max Beckmann, who, in powerful expressionist distortion, portrayed nightmarish situations of torture and moral perversion. These three artists came together in the 1925 exhibit in Mannheim called *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (The New Objectivity) which marked the beginning of a new realism with a socialistic flavor. In literature its leading representative was the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht.

Political and anti-elitist themes also found expression in Constructivism, a Russian movement around 1917, the year of the Revolution. More sculptural in orientation, it insisted on the social purpose of art and the alliance of artist, architect, and engineer in creating a new environment reflective of the advances in technology as well as in politics, as against the position of the Suprematist Malevich who insisted on the absolute separation of art and the real world. Dada and Surrealism both exhibited a political aspect, mixed up, however with Freudianism, in the case of the latter. The Berlin dadaists were political and were associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, particularly George

Grosz, while the others chose the path of nihilism. In France, the surrealists led by the high priest Andre Breton came under the influence of Leon Trotsky. Breton himself declared that the three heroes of surrealism were Lautreamont (famous for his surrealist definition of beauty as "the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table"), Sigmund Freud, and Leon Trotsky. The surrealists, however, by their very program, could not create a coherent political statement in their art. Perhaps the closest they came to political content in their work was Salvador Dali's *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans; Premonition of Civil War* done in 1936 in which the gigantic monster even becomes more terrifying and absurd with the surrealist technique. This work could readily be taken as a comment on the events in Spain leading to the disastrous war between the republicans and loyalists, but Dali himself later went over to the side of the fascist Franco.

It was also in this period that Pablo Picasso (1880-1973) painted in the late cubist idiom his great painting of protest against Fascism in Spain. *Guernica* is his strong political statement of horror and indignation on the bombing of the small Basque town of Guernica by the loyalists aided by Hitler. Done in immediate reaction to the event, it was exhibited at the Spanish Pavillion at the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1937. Picasso dealt with social themes from as early as his Blue Period at the turn of the century through the Civil War in Spain in 1937 then to the Second World War and up to the Korean War, as in his *Massacre in Korea* done in 1951, with allusions to Goya's *Tres de Mayo 1808*. A recurring symbol of death and destruction in his work is the Minotaur over which an innocent child may prevail. Picasso himself also strove to make his political stand perfectly clear. Of the *Guernica*, he declared, while in the midst of work on the painting: "The war in Spain is the battle of reaction against the people, against liberty. My whole career has been one continual struggle against reaction and the death of art. In the painting on which I am now at work, which I shall call *Guernica* -- and in all my recent works -- I am very clearly expressing my horror at the military caste which has plunged Spain into a sea of suffering and death." In an interview in 1945 on his art, Picasso declared with fervor: "What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he's a painter, or

ears if he's a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he's a poet, or even, if he's a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he's at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery, or happy events, to people, and by virtue of an ivory indifference to detach yourself from the life which they copiously bring you? No, painting is not done to decorate apartments, it is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy."

Social Realism in the United States

American art, which for a time had been chafing under academic aestheticism and the dominant influence of the School of Paris, began to acquire a national character and assertiveness with the American Scene movement of the Thirties. This movement with its "Paint America" slogan was, on one hand, a reaction to European cultural domination especially in painting, and, on the other hand, a support of environmentalist theories which would have art draw inspiration from its natural and social environment.

A nineteenth century popular exponent of environmentalism was the psychologist Archibald Allison who asserted that since knowledge was to be derived from experiences and associations of ideas and since one's most extensive experiences and lasting associations are those arising from one's immediate environment, as well as from the history and traditions of the country, it would naturally follow that the imagination of the artist must derive its forms and receive its character from the place in which he was born and in which he lives. Likewise, the French philosopher Hippolyte Taine with his theories of *race*, *moment*, and *milieu* as the determinants of culture which had been of weighty influence on the French Realists and naturalists, also influenced the American painters through the active dissemination of his theories by the regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton who had read his work in Paris in 1908. In the mid-thirties, Holger Cahill taking up the same trend declared that "art is a normal social growth deeply rooted in the life of mankind and extremely sensitive to the environments created by human society."²⁰

This orientation towards American life and experience as the subject of art did not, however, manifest itself only in the

Thirties. As early as 1907, the Group of Eight consisting of Arthur B. Davies, Prendergast, Lawson, Robert Henri, George Luks, Glackens, John Sloan, Shinn, and later, George Bellows, especially the realists among them who derived from the tradition of Eakins, essentially established what was called the Ashcan School of painting which was characterized by a revolt against academism and a determination to bring painting back into direct touch with life.

Later in the Thirties, the public began to distinguish two major groups within the American Scene movement: The Regionalists, represented by Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, John Stuart Curry, and the Social Realists, represented by Ben Shahn; the brothers Moses, Raphael, and Isaac Soyser; Reginald Marsh, Philip Evergood, and Peter Blume, joined by a later group consisting of Jack Levine, Jacob Lawrence, and George Tooker who continued painting to the years after the Second World War, through the Cold War, the Korean War, and the McCarthy era.

The two groups shared in the common goals of freeing American painting from European domination by painting the American environment and by creating an art relevant to all Americans nationwide rather than to a small cultural elite. This was likewise to be accomplished by means of group effort which tempered excessive individualism. Both groups painted rural and city scenes and developed in different styles according to each artist. The similarity, however, ended there. The Regionalists were apolitical painters of American folk traditions, occupations, and collective experiences in all their local color, often with a touch of nostalgia and an edifying idealization that was unaffected by the Depression. The Social Realists, on the other hand, more familiar with the urban realities of the worker and the tenement dweller, were highly politicized, seeking radical change, and lending their art to revolutionary causes. While they also believed, like the Regionalists, in painting the American Scene, they regarded the concern of Benton and Thomas Craven for "typical American experiences" outside, however, of social issues, as a symptom of right-wing nationalism with its incipient fascism in images that would serve to glorify the nation and the State, in the same way that Hitler's militaristic state was then drumbeating for an art for the glorification

of the Fatherland. Social Realism in the United States, while it depicted contemporary realities, also projected itself into the future by contributing to shape the American Dream, an idyllic vision of *Amerika* sustained by generations of Europeans that had been persecuted in the continent. In sum, Regionalism simply wanted to create art from local conditions, while Social Realism wanted to change these conditions.

Viewed in historical perspective, political art in the United States was given an impetus by the Depression, which was in itself an unprecedented and shattering economic experience. Edmund Wilson wrote that between the Crash of Wall Street on "Black Thursday," October 24, 1928 up to 1933, "the whole structure of American society seemed actually to be going to pieces," amidst Herbert Hoover's empty words assuring economic recovery. Shock waves registered throughout the country as national income fell from \$81 billion to \$41 billion, 85,000 businesses failed, 9 million savings accounts were unpaid out, and 773 national banks and 3,600 banks failed. During this period, the artists came under a number of state programs for economic assistance instituted during the height of the Depression. In 1933, President FD Roosevelt instituted the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) with the American Scene as the program's guiding theme. When this closed the following year, in its place was the Section of Painting and Sculpture in the Treasury Department. In 1935 the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration was created. These relief projects supported painters, sculptors, photographers, writers, composers, and playwrights who ranged over the entire country to document its conditions.

In the context of the widespread poverty, social realism was art as an instrument for change. Paintings and posters expressed the public outcry for social reforms. Their subjects were taken from immediate and urgent reality: social injustice, massive unemployment, the collusion of the capitalists and the military in the suppression of the workers' movement, the dehumanizing conditions of labor and industry, rural poverty and urban squalor, starvation and foreclosure, racial inequality. In the artistic documentation of Hard Times, the recurring leit-motif all over the country was "Which side are you on? Which side are you on?" — a question originally asked by Mrs. Sam

Reece, after armed deputies finished ransacking her cabin in search of her husband who had helped organize a miner's strike in Kentucky.²¹

The period saw the rise of labor unionism and the intensification of the workers' struggle in strikes and pickets. The proletariat grew into a strong and unified force, inspired by the example of its martyrs. Joe Hill, a labor leader executed in 1915 bravely admonished the workers while going to his death: "Don't mourn for me, organize!" Tom Mooney was another labor leader who suffered persecution in 1916. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1927 more on the basis of their anarchist politics in a period of Red scare and anti-immigrationism than for their murder and robbery charge based on flimsy evidence. Meanwhile, John Reed Clubs (named after the American journalist who recorded the Russian Revolution in 1917) were formed in 1929 throughout the country to develop political awareness and encourage proletarian art and literature. Thus, in 1935, the American Writers' Congress called upon writers to participate in a new "literary movement" springing from an alliance of writers and artists of the working class. Writers contributed to the major venues of proletarian literature, *Masses* and *New Masses* which hailed the advent of a world proletarian literature as concomitant to the rise of the world proletariat. All in all, the sentiments of artists were expressed simply in the lines: "It's pretty hard to sing of moonlight now/ Of benches in the park and lovers' lanes/ . . . What shall a lover sing when half the land/ Is driven cold and lives on dark despair?"

While the editor of the *New Masses* placed emphasis on an author's subject matter and background, others stressed the importance of a writer's revolutionary vision. Thus, Edward Searer, writing in the *Partisan Review*, noticed that the proletarian novel was not necessarily "a novel written by a worker, about workers, or for workers," but it was rather defined in terms of "history and political philosophy in the materialist dialectic, recognition of the class struggle, acceptance of the historic role of the proletariat in the formation of a new and socialistic society."²²

The years before the Second World War also saw the rise of fascism abroad in Europe with Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy. Significant, however, is the fact that fascism

had its adherents in America. No less than William Randolph Hearst, owner of a publishing empire, offered the observation in 1935 that "whenever you hear a prominent American called a 'Fascist', you can usually make up your mind that the man is simply a Loyal Citizen who stands for Americanism" — with its insidious emphasis on "loyal" which eventually led to the witchhunting of the "disloyal", and the notion of Americanism which identifies fascism with an orthodox state nationalism and patriotism in the interest of the "true spirit" of America. In 1936, the Popular Front inaugurated that year called for alliances with the democratic forces of the Western world to act in common defense against fascism. The following year, 1935, saw the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War which drew the support of the international brigade of artists and writers in unity with the republican struggle against the Loyalists led by Francisco Franco. In 1936, the first Artists' Congress held in New York reiterated the call for a United Front, with Lewis Mumford exhorting artists to fight against fascism, social inequality, and economic depression which were the enemies of human culture. At this point, hostilities broke out openly between the Social Realists and the Regionalists which the former identified as "Roosevelt-fostered national chauvinist art."

Foremost of the Social Realists was Ben Shahn who began his career, like many artists, in the School of Paris. The social orientation of his work began with a series of paintings on the Dreyfus case in 1930, after which he realized the derivative character of his early works. His statement on Matisse revealed this new awareness: ". . . so full of verve in Paris . . . a little illogical here. His idiom was without roots in our city, it languished like a hothouse plant."²³ His next series had as subject the Tom Mooney case. His set of murals for New York's Riker Island Penitentiary clearly reflected his harsh criticism of American institutions. In his 1937 mural for the county center of Roosevelt, New Jersey, he showed Jewish refugees achieving better living conditions through trade unionism and government resettlement programs. Shahn, however, is known best for his 23 gouaches done in 1932 on the *Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* in which he took up the cause of the two political martyrs. These he executed into a mural as late as 1967. Other well-known works of his are *Miners' Wives* (1948) and the *Welders*

(1944) which was made into a poster. He made use of photographs and newspaper illustrations to create his images of social realities. Later he became more and more concerned with the artist's personal approach and his intimate response to social issues.

Other social realists such as the Soyer brothers and Philip Evergood who themselves came from privileged backgrounds saw the need for personal experience and involvement in the lives of the workers whose cause they espoused. Raphael Soyer believed that "painting must describe and express people, their lives, and times." An important painting of his is *Reading from Left to Right* (1936), a work of social irony which shows men reduced to penury and wandering as bums in the cities. Reginald Marsh advised the artist: "Go out into the street and stare at the people. Go out into the subway, stare at the people." An important work of his is *The Park Bench* showing a group of unemployed men and women whiling away their time on a city park bench, one of them reading the *Daily Worker* which in the 1930s reached a peak circulation of 150,000. Philip Evergood painted *Don't Cry, Mother*, an expressive image of hunger and deprivation, and *An American Tragedy*, a meticulously researched painting on the massacre of steelworkers in 1937. Peter Blume did the well-known anti-fascist painting, *The Eternal City*, from his own experience in Rome.

A younger group of social realists who worked until the Fifties included Jack Levine who used expressionist distortion in *Gangster's Funeral* and *The Feast of Pure Reason* (1937) which satirized bureaucratic corruption and organized crime. Jacob Lawrence, a black artist, is known for his *Tombstones* (1942) drawn from Negro life in the ghettos. The social realist active in the Fifties was George Tooker who painted *The Subway* and *The Post Office* in protest against the dehumanization of the urban experience.

In Mexico

It was in the Thirties with its climate of militant protest that Mexican art reached its peak of popularity in the United States. American artists who admired the work of Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco as an art drawn from the Mexican tradition and

from the experiences of the people had on a number of occasions interacted with the Mexican muralists. There was a large exhibition of Mexican art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1930 and a cycle of exhibitions the following year. Orozco lived in New York from 1927 to 1932. Diego Rivera visited San Francisco in 1930 and was in New York between 1931 to 1933 with a trip to Detroit to do murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts. David Alfaro Siqueiros lived in Los Angeles in 1932 and helped to promote mural painting. In 1933 Ben Shahn worked with Diego Rivera on the large mural *Man at the Crossroads* intended for the Rockefeller Center in New York but which was later destroyed because Rivera refused to remove Lenin's portrait from it. The theme of the mural was the choice offered man between two conflicting ways of life: fascism and capitalism versus socialism and freedom. Fortunately, a copy of the work exists in Mexico.

The art of the Mexican muralists of a strong socio-political orientation is best viewed against the rich historical background of revolutions that transformed Mexico for more than a century. In pre-Columbian times, the Valley of Mexico constituted the great Aztec kingdom conquered by Cortes in 1521. After three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, the Creoles under the priest Hidalgo led an aborted revolution. Another Creole priest, Jose Maria Morelos, took up from where Hidalgo left and declared Mexican independence in 1813. In 1821 the viceroy from Spain agreed in the Treaty of Cordoba to recognize the independence of Mexico. After independence, three stages in the struggle of the despoiled native to shake off the political, social and economic dominance of the descendants of the Spanish conquerors may be discerned.

The first stage from 1821 to 1855 was the period of military anarchy and *caudillismo* marked by corruption and incompetence. The second stage from 1855 to 1910 was the period of liberalism under Juarez, then the unsuccessful attempt on the part of the French to establish an empire in Mexico under Maximilian, followed by despotism under Porfirio Diaz who allowed the landowners to despoil the peasants of their lands and granted generous concessions to foreign capitalists.

The third stage from 1911 to 1940 is called the period of the Mexican Revolution. Pressured by the strengthening opposi-

tion and by the revolutionists united under the cry of "Effective Suffrage, Non-reelection and Redistribution of Land," Porfirio Diaz in 1911 resigned and left the country. He was briefly replaced by Madero followed by a four-year dictatorship under General Victoriano Huerta during which a series of revolts broke out under the leadership of Carranza, Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata and others. Meanwhile, there was increasing tension between Mexico and the United States which chose which president to recognize. General Carranza came to power but later showed himself unwilling to carry out the full program of the Revolution, thus provoking more uprisings.

General Alvaro Obregon succeeded Carranza as president from 1920 to 1924. Upon the advice of his enlightened Minister of Education, Jose Vasconcelos, the policy of government patronage of the arts was extended. The foundation was also laid down for the characteristically Mexican open air rural art schools. Artists gathered around the personality of Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), artist-scholar of considerable influence. It was also during this time that the three major Mexican artists began to make their presence felt. Orozco had come back from the United States in 1919; Rivera came back from Europe in 1921 and Siqueiros in 1922.

It was during this period that art flourished as the chief cultural vehicle of the Revolution. Siqueiros and Rivera participated actively in the Revolution, while Orozco, more retiring, expressed his revolutionary ideals in his fervent art. In 1921 Siqueiros published a manifesto advocating the abandonment of easel painting in favor of the mural and stressing the importance of the theme of the painting as much as its style and execution. He advocated the creation of "a monumental and heroic art, a human and public art, with the direct and living example of our great masters and the extraordinary cultures of pre-Hispanic America." In 1922, the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors was formed, with the government encouraging their creativity by commissioning them to cover the walls of public buildings with murals. Thus, Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco, with some others, revived the fresco technique and painted murals depicting scenes of revolutionary struggle. These depicted in a vigorous and powerful figuration the themes of the revolution through history up to the present time: violent

opposition to foreign domination, special privilege, large estates which exploited the peasant populations, concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and tyranny of office.

The liberal Obregon was followed by Calles who proved to be unsympathetic to the cause of revolutionary art. During his term the Syndicate of Artists was disbanded and Orozco and others dismissed from the government service. But art would flourish once again under the leadership of General Lazaro Cardenas, President from 1934 to 1940, who sincerely carried out the principles of the Mexican Revolution. This he did by increasing the number of public schools, redistributing land to the peons, sponsoring the organization of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, nationalizing the big industries and taking over the oil wells from the foreign corporations when these refused to increase the wages of their laborers. During his regime which was favorable to progressive socialistic art, the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists was formed and, to foster a new art movement for the masses, the *Taller de Grafica Popular*. Founded in 1937, the *Taller*, a workshop of the graphic arts, was under the leadership of Leopoldo Mendez, an excellent graphic artist, and American-born Pablo O'Higgins. It favored communal activity and group projects and stressed the dynamic impact of the message. Cardenas' term ended in 1940 with the election of General Camacho during which term the United States and Mexico signed a series of agreements which included united military action in the event of foreign aggression, reciprocal use of airfields, trade concessions, credits, and the regulation of exports, as well as American loans to finance economic projects.

Important works of the Mexican artists include: Rivera's 1933 mural for the Ford motorcar works at Detroit showing the achievement of industrialization, his 1930 mural with scenes of the Spanish conquest at the Palace of Cortes in Cuernavaca, the *Mexican War of Independence*, a large mural done from 1929 to 1945 at the Royal Palace at Mexico City, and smaller works such as *Woman Grinding Maize* in 1926; Siqueiros' *Echo of a Scream* (1937), *Proletarian Victim* (1933), the mural *Revolution Against the Diaz Dictatorship* painted from 1957 to 1966 in the Castle of Chapultepec in Mexico City; Orozco's *Man in Four Aspects* (1935) which is a circular fresco in the dome of

the Assembly Hall of the University of Guadalajara, *The White Horse* (1922), *Christ Destroying His Cross* (1932-34) in Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. These artists pursued individual styles while influenced by their indigenous traditions. They also experimented in the use of new materials. Siqueiros in *Proletarian Victim* painted on burlap in duco. Some of Rivera's paintings were done in encaustic which uses colored wax, but most of his works are true frescoes with his palette limited to earth colors to which he added green, blue, and black, with earth reds obtained from tezontle, a native red volcanic stone.

In Russia

On the eve of the Russian Revolution in 1917, there were several art groups in Russia. Among them were the Russian Formalists composed of brilliant young philologists such as Roman Jakobson, Victor Shklovsky, and Yuri Tynyanov, who focused on the intrinsic study of literature, the exploration of technique and language, and the study of style and composition. Their theoretical framework based on Saussurean linguistics posits the theory of "displacement" or "deformation" as against the "reflection theory" based on mimesis as elaborated by Lukacs. A second group consisted of the writers sympathetic to the Revolution but who continued to work in the nineteenth century traditions. The third group was the *Proletkult*, radical left-wing writers for whom art was primarily a captive reflection of class consciousness and a means of uniting and rallying class forces. Aside from these there were modernist groups linked to prerevolutionary styles, such as symbolism, and futurism. All these had individual members who supported the revolutionary cause, but it was only the Futurists who as a group took a stand for the revolutionary effort. One of their prominent members was the poet Mayakovsky who was also associated with the constructivist artists. At the beginning, the Constructivists upheld the revolutionary cause in their manifestoes that advocated the democratization of art and recognized its social function. Vladimir Tatlin, for instance designed the constructivist sculpture, *Monument to the Third International*. But with official disfavor, its members dispersed and left for Germany, France, and the United States.

One of the problems of postrevolutionary art has to do with the question of the continuing usability and validity of prerevolutionary forms in the period of socialist construction. Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and Lunacharsky upheld the necessity of preserving the cultural heritage of earlier historical stages. Lunacharsky was an outstanding critic during the revolutionary period because, as Maynard Solomon points out, he had "the ability to show the connections between class consciousness, individual psychology manifested in the creator's biography and the ideological meaning of a given work of art." After October 1917, Lunacharsky assumed the guardianship of Soviet art by "preserving cultural monuments from vandalism, supervising the publication of great literature, keeping the peace between the warring factions of the myriad splinter groups, protecting each artistic manifestation and artistic school from the onslaughts of the others, protecting all from the pre-emptive moves of the politicians, creating a United Front among the intelligentsia in the service of the Revolution, in addition to laying the educational foundations for the elimination of illiteracy in the Soviet Union and supervising every aspect of educational and cultural life."²⁴ A later theoretician was Bukharin whose importance lay in his reintroduction of formalist concepts in postrevolutionary aesthetics. It is he who first combined the Russian Formalist and sociological positions. He declared that "every poetical work is an integral unity in which sound, ideas, imagery, etc., are component parts synthetically united." Lenin, whose contribution lay primarily in the political field had this particular statement to say regarding freedom: "There can be no real and effective freedom in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites."

Official policy in culture rigidified from the mid 1930s to 1956 under the pervasive influence of Zhdanovism. It was under Zhdanov that Socialist Realism was canonized as official style. Zhdanovism which flourished during Stalin's rule insisted on model-types in the arts and in idealized heroes for political edification. Scholars have exposed Zhdanovism as a perversion of the socialist theory in art.

4

THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

In the spirit of the original school of realism, social realism in the Philippines stresses the choice of contemporary subject matter drawn from the conditions and events of one's time. The artist consciously situates himself and his art in the historical process and in his society. For him, this is more than assuming an intellectual position, for it involves the active and practical aspect of interacting with the people who are the subject matter of his work and engaging in the current issues that affect our lives.

On the surface, social realism may appear to have affinities with folk genre of the regional schools, such as that of the Laguna Lakeshore artists. While folk genre manifests a strong sense of community, particularly, the rural community, it usually revolves around traditional and feudal customs and values, especially religious festivities, and is based on the picturesque with the tendency to idealize rural life. Social realism, on the other hand, is essentially based on a keen awareness of conflict. While the theme of struggle may not always be evident in a single painting, it crystallizes as a vision of reality from the artists' body of work.

Themes: City Workers

A large number of social realist paintings have to do with peasants and workers who possess labor power and who enter into relations of production within the semi-feudal, semi-colonial economic order. Within these relations, tensions arise when the workers' welfare and interests come into conflict with institutional safeguards, through law and decree, on the interests of the property owners and employers who aim at extracting the maximum advantage, that is the maximum surplus value, in terms of profit, from the relationship. Thus, a common subject of social realist painting is the workers' struggle taking the form of strikes and pickets which have strengthened their organizational unity and created a growing body of cultural forms, such as the numerous songs and poems that heighten their

morale. Strikes when vigorously suppressed with the use of arms can intensify into tragic and bloody confrontations, with the side of the unarmed workers suffering casualties. Paintings of Neil Doloricon and Al Manrique have dealt with the subject of strikes in which the emphasis may be on the militancy of the workers or on the bloody suppression of a strike. Often the problems of labor are viewed in the context of the family, a characteristic which emerges naturally from the Filipino consciousness. For instance, a mother carrying a child gazes out severely and reproachfully, while behind her a worker with a placard lies bloodied on the ground. Or a worker on the eve of a strike anxiously discusses its prospects with his wife, while the huge industrial monster of the factory rises formidably beyond the window of their house.

Perhaps the most common theme of the social realists is that of urban poverty. As in the paintings of Edgar Fernandez, slums and squatter areas have figured prominently as an inescapable reality of urban life today. Low wages and unemployment go hand in hand with the lack of opportunities for economic and educational advancement. Wages are kept low, perpetuating exploitative conditions attractive to foreign and multinational corporations which, while providing employment, also remit huge profits to their country base.

The exploitation of workers results in alienation. However, alienation in the context of labor is not in the existentialist sense of a soul-sickness in which man feels alone and isolated from his fellows in "the desolate island of his separate identity." Alienation in labor is historically produced and is a social symptom which occurs to men in groups engaged in production. In his alienation from the work process, man does not realize his full potential in his work but functions like a machine in dehumanized labor. In the alienation of man from his products, the worker has no control over the products of his hands. They are, to the producer himself, inaccessible commodities which are beyond his capacity to buy and little of what he produces are for his own consumption. This theme has been dealt with sensitively in the paintings of Antipas Delotavo and Neil Doloricon, characterized by a strong sense of particularity, in their reference to billboards and inclusion of logos of multinational products.

In the alienation of man from nature, man loses his harmony with nature, but instead sees it as an alien phenomenon which is to be ruthlessly despoiled for raw materials to be transformed by the production processes. Finally, the worker is alienated from his own species-being, his essential humanity which is social, creative, whole, universal, and free. In painting, the theme of the worker's alienation is eloquently portrayed in the work of Delotavo, particularly in his latest series on construction workers overwhelmed by the massive structures built through their own labor. Still much a part of the theme of alienation is the current drive in export labor which has given rise to problems of unprecedented social effects both in the country of work and in the Philippines. Export labor which entails the rigors of separation from family and familiar social environment as well as the psychological dislocations of culture shock is a new and severe form of workers' alienation. Artists who have alluded to export labor are Edgar Fernandez in his Jeepney Series (*Latak ng Saudi*), Antipas Delotavo in his painting of female workers in *Export*, and Imelda Cajipe-Endaya in her paintings of social change. Workers as constituting society's productive force are central subjects in the painting *Capital* by de Asis; they are shown against the huge industrial complex as background. Habulan has shown the worker clothed in the rags of poverty beside machines spewing smoke and flame. In the large painting entitled *Kagampan* (Fullness of Time), workers and peasants come together in a tableau, as armed with their tools, they present a strong image of solidarity and readiness to assume their historic role.

Peasants and Farm Workers

In the country today, the peasants constitute the widest base of exploitation by reason of their large numbers and by the diverse means by which they have suffered economic oppression from the past to the present. There are tenants and *kasama* who labor within the traditional feudal system of crop distribution. To the field workers belong the *sakadas*, wage laborers in the sugar plantations, as well as the large numbers of contract workers in the multinational concessions. The struggle of peasants and farm workers for better conditions is often

suppressed with force by landlords' armies. Sometimes, as in the South, the farmers are displaced from the lands they cultivate to be grouped together in hastily built villages for census purposes.

Of the social realists, Renato Habulan has dealt with the subject of peasants in a number of memorable portraits. The conflict of peasant or *sakada* and landlord is the subject of his series entitled *Dulo't Dulo* (Polarities) in which he contrasts the barefoot and ragged peasants with the landlord *illustrados* in their elegant finery. The same artist's *Patigan* series touches on the presence of the military in the rural areas, a theme which is also present in Al Manrique's work.

Also an aspect in the rural setting is the implementation of development programs which often involve profound changes in the people's way of life. Hydroelectric projects that necessitate the building of dams threaten to submerge entire villages and fertile fields under water and displace communities from their centuries-old ancestral lands. Most affected by these programs are the cultural communities, such as the Bontocs, Kalingas and Ifugaos of the Cordilleras which is the site of the Chico Dam project, as well as the Aetas in various parts of the country. The displacement and relocation of large numbers and communities are often the consequence of hydroelectric projects and of corporate logging and mining operations. Of the artists who have dealt on this theme, Renato Habulan did *Alay Kay Macliing* in honor of the slain Bontoc leader.

The Woman Issue

Another recent theme of socio-political art in the Philippines is that of women's liberation. Historically in the feudal system and in the present semi-feudal, semi-colonial conditions, women have suffered from institutionalized exploitation and prejudicial treatment. The struggle of women for liberation from the traditional fetters is to be viewed in the context of the larger struggle of the people for democracy, freedom, and justice. Antipas Delotavo in his paintings has shown the new forms in which women are exploited in export labor, in the

field of entertainment, and in the tourist industry, as well as the anguish and spiritual corruption that result from these. Neil Doricón has also movingly portrayed the plight of the young Filipina of the working class in *Tess, Saan Ka Ba Pupunta?*. In recent works such as *Ang Bagong Pilipina*, Pablo Baens Santos has shown in a stronger and more dynamic style the militancy of the enlightened Filipina. Edgar Talusan Fernandez has introduced into the Mother-and-Child theme, traditionally sentimental, socio-political allusions which are symbolic of the future human order.

Nationalism

In the 19th century, the issue of nationalism came to the fore with the rise of the nation states in Europe during the period of the Romantic Movement. It was based on the belief in a national soul or genius that its citizens shared and which manifested itself in culture. Nationalism also had to do with the definition of national boundaries that came as a result of increased political unity and the sense of a sovereign people.

In the Third World, nationalism is necessarily viewed in the light of the colonial experience. During the nineteenth century Propaganda Movement, Filipino scholars like Rizal, Pardo de Tavera, and Epifanio de los Santos, did pioneering research on the precolonial past and wrote articles about the indigenous cultural traditions which the colonizers had attempted to efface. Their efforts constituted an affirmation of cultural identity in the face of colonial domination. When emphasizing ethnic identity in culture, nationalism has been invoked in the celebration of the national traditions, the artistic heritage of the past, and the ever-growing body of art and culture. As such, nationalism when limited to the cultural aspect has often been coopted as an important part of state ideology which instills ethnic and racial pride in order to neutralize internal conflicts into a condition of acquiescence beneficial to interests of the dominant class. This kind of nationalism may also border on a narrow parochialism which adopts the posture of rejecting as "foreign" certain significant currents of thought which, while indeed Western in their origin, are of universal relevance.

COOPTATION
OF CULTURE
NATIONALISM

For Third World countries the economies of which are linked to, or in fact, controlled by First World interests, a merely cultural definition of nationalism would misrepresent the contemporary reality of people in struggle against the orchestrated strategies of imperialism both from within and from without. Such would be abstracting culture from the economic realities that shape it. Nationalism in the present day calls for a political and not merely cultural definition. Central to it is the issue of the people's interests vis-a-vis those of the imperialist powers.

National Identity

Related to the issue of nationalism is that of national identity. This issue was raised in the postwar Fifties in the first decade of the Republic. Some writers looked for national identity in the precolonial period and stressed the need to return to "roots" and indigenous values. Others placed emphasis on the "Spanish colonial heritage" as an essential part of its definition. But national identity cannot reside in a particular historical period, such as the precolonial period, the Spanish colonial period, or the 19th century Propaganda period. In fact, national identity instead of being static and merely accretive, is a dynamic concept that evolves with the historical circumstances and conditions which restate and redefine the people's true interests.

In the matter of artistic form and expression, indigenous art, as ethnic and folk, plays a part in the quest for national identity, because such belongs to the people's cultural heritage. Ethnic art is the art of the non-Christian groups, predominant among them being the politically organized Muslim groups of the South which have historically resisted the encroachment and control of the colonial powers and have thereby been able to preserve the ancient and valuable artistic traditions from the precolonial era. Folk art is the art of the Christianized lowlanders of the rural areas and as such includes a Christian religious component, as can be seen in the numerous artistic expressions revolving around fiestas of the Catholic calendar. Since both ethnic and folk art have a common indigenous base, their boundaries are blurred.

It is important to note that while ethnic art is part of the large range of our national culture, it has a distinct regional character, as in the case of Maranao, Ifugao or T'boli art. Thus efforts have been made to bring the ethnic art of the regions to national awareness and appreciation. Moreover, ethnic art is rooted in social and religious rituals, traditions, and values and must be viewed within this context.

Ethnic art constitutes a large body of indigenous design and decorative motifs. These have traditionally been integrated to functional objects, as the *sari-manok*, for instance, has been used to embellish a large number of domestic and ritual objects from the *Kudkuran* (coconut-grater) to the brightly-painted *ku-lintangan*. Ethnic and folk art make up our heritage of artistic design, and as such can be integrated into contemporary art as symbolic of the native spirit. From them it is also possible to draw out the values of indigenous aesthetics in terms of the use of the formal elements (with the underlying social implications) and integrate these with understanding into the contemporary art context.

Form

Needless to say, social realist works are not confined to paintings in oil on canvas, although a number of them are in this medium, with others in acrylic and watercolor. A significant number are editorial cartoons, illustrations, drawings in pen and ink, collages, prints, posters, and portable murals on cloth or on manila paper for large indoor or outdoor assemblies. Low reliefs, assemblages and three-dimensional sculptures have also extended the range of social realism. Particularly noteworthy is the use of non-traditional materials, including bamboo, nipa, and different "found objects". Recently, there have been successful attempts to integrate the visual arts with the performing arts.

Style

The term "realism" in social realism within the Philippine context is not limited to mean realism strictly in the original sense of keen observation of and fidelity to reality in which

no wrinkle, defect, irregularity of proportion, or infirmity of flesh is spared. Realism in Philippine social realism is not a stylistic term; instead, it is a shared point of view which seeks to expose or to lay bare the true conditions of Philippine society as well as to point out solutions by which these conditions are changed and transcended to achieve a truly human order. It involves observation in the sense that the social realist must necessarily know his subject which is Philippine society with its contradictions and its forces in conflict.

Realism in the strict sense, requiring fidelity to empirical fact, is only one of the styles in social realism. Others show the influence of surrealism, expressionism, or even conceptual art. But on the whole, the social realists have developed original and personal styles according to their individual temperaments.



SPOLIARIUM NG ATING PANAHO "Ang daigdig ay atin, ang lipunang ay atin, ang kinabukasan ay atin, kung hindi lagi kikita, sino ang kikita? Kung hindi lagi kikita, sino ang kikita?"

SPOLIARIUM NG ATING PANAHO

Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista't
Arkitekto '70

5

THE ARTISTS

PABLO BAENS SANTOS

Pablo "Adi" Baens Santos, one of the mainstays of social realism, was born in Manila in 1943. He obtained his education at the UP College of Fine Arts. Before the declaration of martial law, in 1972, he worked as layout artist and illustrator and contributed photographic pictorials to the leading newspaper, the *Manila Times*. It was, according to the artist, a working experience which awakened him to social realities. In his association with the journalistic profession, he came in contact with workers, the ethnic minorities, and the urban poor. In their struggle for survival, he found a large fund of artistic material at the same time that he realized the social obligation of the artist. The rallies, mass actions and cultural presentations of the pre-martial law days which he covered as photographer and illustrator raised his political consciousness. But at the time, it was not easy for him to express his response to the issues in painting. His conservative idiom was not suitable to the dynamic expression of the people's movement for change.

After about four years of restless exploration in terms of subject matter and style, Adi Baens participated in a 3-man show at the Sining Kamalig in 1974. He had then become one of the first members of the *Kaisahan* group of artists who developed as social realists. His socio-political orientation manifested itself in paintings dealing with urban poverty: street urchins, mother-and-child of the slums, workers. *Larawan ng Mag-Ina*, *Pangitain sa Dilim*, *Pulang Tala* belong to this early period. In all these, the solitary figure is centered against a background which combines simple geometric elements to suggest structures and a sky in which the symbolism of red plays a significant part. In *Pangitain sa Dilim*, the solitary head of a boy, eyes closed and grimacing in pain, floats disembodied in the sky above a smoldering city, thus calling to mind similar paintings of Odilon Redon and Siqueiros' *Echo of a Scream*. From these early paintings can be noted certain qualities which will persist in his later

work: a strong symbolic tendency with emphasis on the figure or figures, often with central focusing; simplification of the background into a space of expressive color, in his early period, with geometric elements; a strong concern for design, restraint in the use of color with the tendency to monochrome; a penchant for dynamic compositions with an innovative approach to scale. Also noteworthy is the perceptible influence of the Mexican school on his work of the mid-seventies, as in the two paintings, *Lakas ng Sambayanan* (Strength of the People) and *Kamay na Itim* (Black Hand). The first is the image of a worker charging frontally with clenched fists, powerfully prominent and foreshortened, as his symbolic figure hovers over the toiling masses in general. Figures waving red streamers float in the sky like the baroque *putti* but in a new context. In *Kamay na Itim*, a family group is compressed into a small pushcart while a black hand muzzles the mouth of the central figure to signify the stifling of free speech. His acrylic works of 1974 and 1975, including those exhibited at his first one-man show, generally dealt with poverty issues in which images of ragged children and mother-and-child play an important part.

In 1979 Pablo Baens Santos did another series of works, this time in oil, consisting of paintings dealing with social conflict and the major contradictions in Philippine society. Thematically, this series takes the earlier theme of poverty on a higher level with the perception of the social forces which form antagonistic relationships because of conflicting interests. From his earlier images exposing the true and present conditions of the Filipino masses — which in fact constituted the early period of social realism in general — he proceeded to the motive forces underlying these conditions. The titles of these new works attest to this reorientation: *Panginoong Maylupa*, (Landlord), *Komprador*, *Welga* (Strike), *Mga Mulat na Magsasaka* (Enlightened Workers), *Kontradiksiyon*. It is the consciousness of the contradictions in society that in fact constitutes the underlying premise of social realism which distinguishes it from paintings of the slums, beggars, or peasants in the field or social genre in general, so that while these may be subsumed under the social realist vision, these are not *per se* social realist. These subjects in fact have often been exploited by many artists for their pic-

turesque qualities and their "human interest" without the artist making any definite political stand.

Baens Santos' paintings of 1979 arrive at the heart of the social realist vision because of their insight into social contradiction. Thus, in his work entitled *Kontradiksyon*, he presents the image of confrontation between the people on one hand and the three evils of Philippine society, namely, feudalism, bureaucrat capitalism, and imperialism. Feudalism — and the country remains semi-feudal in large areas, although it is also semi-capitalist — is the economy based on the exploitative relationship of landlord and tenant farmer perpetuating the poverty and deprivation of the peasant masses who are kept in a position of dependence. Bureaucrat capitalism is the economic evil in which public officials use their positions in the government bureaucracy to gain personal access to the country's resources thereby plundering these and filling their pockets from the coffers of the people inevitably resulting in bankruptcy and severe economic crisis. Imperialism, which has been described as "the last stage of capitalism" is neo-colonialism on a world-wide scale in which foreign monopoly capital — in our case, it is primarily the United States, — controls and manipulates the economy of Third World countries. This is done by using these countries as sources of raw materials, as markets for their finished products which command a higher price than the raw materials and thus perpetuate a balance-of-payments deficit in terms of the relationship of exported and imported goods, as dumping ground for condemned, rejected or surplus goods, particularly medicines, likewise by the continual remittance of huge profits by multinational corporations to their mother companies while crippling local initiative and stifling the development of basic local industries, by imposing onerous economic policies that result in the greater economic hardship of the masses through high interest rates or by monetary devaluations in favor of the dollar, by suppressing the people's movement towards economic independence and sovereignty so as to ensure the protection of their investments, by increasing military aid to shore up threatened puppet regimes and selling expensive military hardware which is a giant industry of the United States and by intervening overtly in

direct action or covertly through CIA machinations to foil the people's movement towards self-determination.

Two other paintings of Baens Santos which center on social conflict in a more specific way are *Panginoong Maylupa* and *Komprador*, both mural in concept. The first which is in a rural context shows a formidable and bespectacled figure — the spectacles while symbolic of the *ilustrado* class are however blind and masklike — trampling upon the peasant masses and threatening them with his fists. The dynamism of the composition is derived from the artist's device of showing the landlord at a steep angle from the point of view of the oppressed peasants below. The second shows the bourgeois entrepreneur in a business suit riding on the backs of the toiling masses. Again the angle of vision is from below upwards, these two works being examples of paintings in which the angle of vision itself becomes expressive of the artist's political espousals. To the antagonistic classes of landlord and peasant in the first and *Komprador* and workers in the second, is added a third ubiquitous element which is that of the blond figure from the skies, in smiling complicity with the landlord and with the *comprador*, symbolizing the imperialist presence, which a dollar sign further signifies. *Welga*, another painting of the period, is a concentrated image of the labor struggle, with strike as the workers' weapon against capitalist oppression. A summing up of these themes is the painting *Malumbay si Ina* (Mother Is Sad) in which the large area of sky is a mother's face sorrowfully viewing the world below which is torn by strife in the masses of figures in turmoil and struggle, while along the horizon faintly emerges a line of people carrying streamers with messages of liberation. His paintings of this period are characterized stylistically by the use of monochromatic brown for an austere effect that avoids the seductions of color, a mural approach to composition which reckons with the innovative disposition of masses of figures on the visual field, and a symbolic treatment of socio-political themes which acquire a generalized and universal character.

In 1982, Pablo Baens Santos produced a new series of works which he exhibited at the Hiraya Gallery. Outstanding of these works were *Kamao*, (Clenched Fist), *Mga Tagapaglikha*

ng *Kasaysayan* (Agents of History), *Martsa ng Bayan* (March of the People), *Aksyong Masa* (Mass Action), *Sagot sa Eleksyon*, (Answer to the Election) and *Boykot*. This series particularizes the issues and situates them in the larger context of the struggle of the Filipino people. *Kamao*, a large painting of mural concept shows the artist's development in dynamism of form. At the center of strong clenched fists is a face crying out in protest. The gesture of defiance is echoed and orchestrated behind him by other clenched fists defiantly and accusingly directed towards the implied oppressor. *Martsa ng Bayan* and *Aksyong Masa* show large organized crowds in rallies and demonstrations that have created the "parliament of the streets". In *Martsa ng Bayan*, the masses are rendered with sweeping brushstrokes, their features generalized, as they move forward together, their red banners streaming, all in all an image of expressionistic fervor. Two works, in particular, link his art to current issues: *Sagot sa Eleksyon* and *Boykot*, both of which allude to the electoral exercise held in early 1982. Baens Santos here departs from general themes to topical issues. His works of the series are characterized by a sweeping fervor and energy, expressionistic and heroic in temper, painterly in style with passages of wash effect expressive of movement, and a rediscovery of the expressive power of color.

These qualities will develop later in new paintings, such as *Bagong Pinay* (New Filipina) and *Alay sa mga Bagong Bayani* (Homage To The New Hero). This latter shows a bolder and more affirmative quality in its strongly delineated figures: here men and women grieve over the bier of a people's martyr draped in the Philippine flag with a streamer in the background which when completed reads "*Hustisya para sa mga Biktima ng Militarisasyon*" (Justice for the Victims of Militarization). With the more boldly articulated figures is a more liberal use of color for vivid accents. The composition likewise is more compact with the figures of the mourners enclosed by the arching banner. *Bagong Bayani* brings the social realism of Baens Santos to new levels of expressiveness with its authoritative artistic handling of the contemporary subject.

In an interview of Adi Baens Santos by H.S. Beltran, Jr., published in *Diliman Review* (November-December 1982), the

artist clearly states his aim to contribute to the development of a truly nationalist Philippine art. He believes that in the context of the present, social realism does not only paint the sufferings of the masses and the oppressive conditions in which they live, it likewise depicts the artists' aspirations for a better life. He likewise points out that art, while being a mirror of reality, is at the same time an agent of change, and it is in this latter aspect of his art that the artist conveys his orientation. He recognizes that the development of his art has also coincided with the development of his political consciousness in the perception of Philippine reality. In *Bagong Pinay*, the artist espouses the feminist cause for the emancipation of women from traditional prejudice and discrimination. Here the figure of the militant woman comes out forcefully and powerfully in his bolder delineation of the figure and dramatic tonal contrasts, thus achieving a heightened expressive power, mural-like in feeling.

At this point, however, social realists still face problems such as audience and form. From Adi Baens Santos' own experience, social realist artists in the city as a whole have been gallery-oriented. This necessarily limits the viewing public to middle-class art lovers and collectors and leaves out the large masses whose aspirations and interests these works espouse. However, these works may serve to awaken the consciousness of the petty bourgeois to the larger realities of our society. Moreover, paintings may also be assembled for traveling exhibits in Manila and far-flung provinces in popular venues such as plazas, churches, schools, and community halls. Sometimes, too, they have been successfully reproduced as posters, calendars or prints. Nevertheless, Pablo Baens Santos recognizes the need to work in popular forms, such as editorial cartoons, illustrations and comics, which make for wide dissemination. For Baens Santos who has a strong artistic penchant for the large public mural (which again may encounter problems of censorship) this poses problems of adjustment. He thinks, however, that the social realists, realizing these contradictions, are in the process of resolving them by exploring possibilities of form and expression that will bring them closer to their aim of participating, through art, in the people's struggle.

ORLANDO CASTILLO

First establishing his reputation as a printmaker, Orlando Castillo was born in 1947 in Manila. He finished his fine arts degree at the University of Santo Tomas. His earliest works were abstracts in which he explored problems of medium and technique. Later, he specialized in the graphic medium, particularly etching, in which he became an active outstanding practitioner. A recognized leader in the graphic arts, he held the position of president of the Philippine Association of Printmakers.

Like many graphic artists, he owed much of his early development to Manuel Rodriguez Sr., the dean of Philippine printmakers, who attracted many young artists to his workshop at the Philippine Women's University since the Sixties. In his etchings, Castillo's strength lay in his strong and inventive sense of design. Among his best known productions was a print series using Philippine folk motifs, such as village maidens riding caretelas, treated with a baroque exuberance typical of his works of the period. In 1974 he did a carnival series of jugglers and acrobats, such as *Mapagpatawa*, and in the same year did tonal romantic landscapes also in etching and aquatint.

Meanwhile, social and political themes gradually began to appear in his prints especially in the period immediately preceding and following the imposition of martial law during which he went through a period of detention. *Uri ng Buhay*, done in 1972, retains the childlike exuberance and inventive spontaneity of his earlier work at the same time that a symbolic note is introduced in the stylized figures of two farmers pulling a sluggish carabao branded with the classical symbols of labor and peasantry, while another figure lies sleeping under a tree and a fourth figure plays with kites. It is in this charming style that the artist conveyed the idea of different approaches to reality. Later, however, the artist shed his decorative flourishes to do prints of a more austere style and more realistic subject matter. This was his series of etchings on torture, human rights violations and struggle in the countryside. His figures became angular and spare, the features jagged to express tension. The only concessions to his natural penchant for baroque fantasy were in the flying angels, like *putti* transported into a different context,

who seemed to play the role of guardians and angels of mercy in the midst of human oppression and suffering.

In 1975, Castillo left printmaking for painting in his one-man show at the Quad Gallery in Makati. These were paintings in oil, largely monochrome, which made use of a stencilling technique playing on tonal contrasts and expressiveness of form. Many of his subjects were drawn from nineteenth century Philippine history, specifically during the period of the Revolution, with personages including Sisa, the mother driven to madness by colonial oppression and the loss of her young sons, Katipunan figures with weapons and rallying flags, and *Guardia Civil*. One painting of the series is *Sulat kay Ina 1896* (Letter to Mother 1896) in which an aging mother seated by a window reads a letter from her son represented in the upper left-hand corner of the painting waging a revolutionary war. In these works of historical subject matter, the artist follows a current trend which takes images within the context of the nineteenth century Philippine Revolution that are specific to their period but at the same time convey undertones or meaning of contemporary import.

Other paintings of the same series have to do with crisis moments in struggle: the turning point in a conflict, the high point of a trial, the moment of farewell for the countryside. Their somber gray monochrome imparts a gravity and elegiac air while the spare color accents are all strikingly allusive: red for blood and fire, blue for suffering, pain and sorrow. The faces are sharp and mobile as they speak, cry out, mock, accuse, grieve or gaze into the future; gestures are lively and dynamic as in attitudes of conflict and struggle. The oscillation of outlines that stems from the stencilling technique creates an effect of movement which is, however, tempered by the geometric framework of diagonals and verticals. Subjects of the series include urban poverty and workers' strikes.

After this show, Orlando Castillo did two series of paintings on peasants in the countryside. The first of these focused on the subject of woman as active participant in production as she works alongside men in the fields and as equally valiant comrade in struggle. With women playing a major role in this series, the artist portrays his subjects with softer features and

with a certain degree of idealization to show woman as man's equal and partner in his endeavors. The style itself and the setting of fields and foliage spring from his earlier decorative impulse. It is in this series that the artist comes closest to a poetic treatment.

His next series which was exhibited in his one-man show at the Hiraya Gallery was based on the experiences of a brief sojourn in the countryside. These were mostly portraits of peasant men and women, often with their farm implements in attitudes of rest. Some of them are mothers with babies straddling their hips. Concentration is on the particularity of face and figure since they are portraits without much indication of setting. The style, too, in this series, is rather literal in an illustrative kind of realism, with all his earlier penchant for exuberant design and ornamental motifs left out altogether. The artist's forte, however, did not seem to lie in realistic figuration with its linear discipline. His vigorous artistic energies could not easily lend themselves to be controlled by painstaking observation and recording that strict realism demands.

Castillo in his most productive period, which was the later Seventies, also did a series, never exhibited in a gallery, of oil works on paper. While the subject of this series did not differ from the above, that is, the experiences of the folk in the countryside and their participation in the national struggle, these works were more successful than those exhibited at the Hiraya. For while the exhibited works were portraits of individuals singled out and seemingly abstracted from their environment, this set of works showed a more vigorous spirit in the interaction of the figures. Rather than portraits, these were situational images: peasants coming together for educational sessions, village doctors administering to the sick and wounded, scenes of childbirth and death. What binds these images together is the strong sense of communality in the various activities and experiences.

One of the oil paintings on paper that came out of this productive period was a striking painting with Marcos as the central figure. The figure, his head emblazoned with light, and one arm upraised dominates the painting. More importantly, his figure clothed in the *barong tagalog*, is draped with the Ameri-

can Stars and Stripes. Above and around him are vignettes of contemporary Philippine experience, most of them having to do with militarization and poverty. This painting is a key work of the artist as it successfully devises a way, through vignettes, to portray aspects of experience that result from the subservience of the regime to American interests. This painting also reflects the artist's creative energies at their most inventive and spontaneous.

In the early Eighties, the artist seemed to reach a turning point when he became engrossed in painting landscapes in pastels and oils. His first landscapes, such as those exhibited in the show *Back-to-Back* with Edgar Fernandez at Greenhills Art Center, showed small figures of peasant and hunter meeting or interacting within a vast rural landscape of rolling hills, large masses of trees and a sky with rays dramatically breaking through cloudbanks. These series of landscapes played down political content, as the artist became absorbed with baroque effects of chiaroscuro. His pastel landscapes did away with the human element altogether and evoked romantic mood; these later evolved mystical elements with occult and cultural symbols. In a last work before he left for the United States, he sought to link up once more with social realism, although in a surrealist vein. This was the oil entitled *Arayat* exhibited at the Gallery Genesis during the intergallery show that accompanied the ASEAN Annual in 1983. The mountain Arayat takes on the figure of a reclining woman, beautiful and mysterious, a personification of the mountain that has traditionally been the refuge and home of insurgents. On the border of the lake below, a figure lies sprawled while the spreading stream of its blood forms the figure of a cross signifying the martyrdom of the people. For the exhibit, the artist strung several horizontal rows of plastic model soldiers in varying stances of aggression and defense, but they did little to enhance an already striking work.

PAPPO DE ASIS

One of the most active social realists and with the widest experience among different social groups, Papo de Asis was born in Dumangas, Iloilo in 1949. Gifted with a natural facility in drawing, he at first sought to develop his talent among the artists of the Mabini tourist strip. For while these artists have now become associated with mass production and the quota system in art, they originated from the group of conservative artists, many of them with a solid academic training in the School of Fine Arts, who set themselves against the modernists asserting themselves in the Fifties. Thus, much of his early training as an artist consisted in painting landscapes with peasants in the Amorsolo style in an idealization of the countryside.

In the mid-seventies, Papo de Asis began to break out of this mold at the same time that he retained the disciplines of figure drawing. His landscapes became secondary pieces and he began to focus his attention to the urban scene of slums and squatter areas that are the homes of the workers and urban poor. It was also about this time that he became associated with the *Kaisahan* artists, such as Adi Baens Santos and Egay Fernandez, who were then in the program of the Centre for the Advancement of Young Artists. Their discussions on the direction of their art led to a turning point in de Asis' artistic orientation. A key painting of this period which signalled his new credo was *Ilog sa Tambakan* (1977). Although the painting has no human figures, it shows that other face of the city in the rotting barge and the rundown structures along the muddy, polluted waters of the river. Here the artist rejects all tendency to prettification and presents the subject, not as a pretext for picturesque or decorative design, but as it is in reality with all that it conveys of urban squalor and deprivation.

In 1981, Papo de Asis had a one-man show at the Rear Room Gallery. This show included such works as *Kapital*, *Mahirap sa Lungsod*, *Kasama*, and *Manggagawang Bukid*. Papo de Asis' figurative gifts became evident in genre paintings such as *Kasama*, portraying a sugar cane worker loading bundles of cane

on a cart as another operates a mill to reduce the cane to pulp, or *Manggagawang Bukid*, with farmers filling baskets with produce from the fields. In style, these are works of Philippine genre in the Amorsolo tradition that reached its peak in the Thirties but continues to have a following in a number of figurative artists. The best in this show, however, were those which deviated from this tradition and moved in search of new directions in the social realist vein. *Mahirap sa Lungsod* brings the figure of a young girl close against the background of shanties in an off-center composition. There is a growing interest in characterization and particularity, as in the figures of the workers for which the artist used real life models, an advance over the earlier figure-types of his work.

The work of Papo de Asis poses problems in figurative art which hold true for many artists in search of direction, with the long tradition of Amorsolo behind the scenes. As social realism necessarily implies a contemporaneous subject matter, it is but fitting that it turn away from the conservative modes of representation of the Amorsolo school which has roots in idealist academism. Social realism, which is a school and not a particular style, should not be construed as restrictive, but as allowing all freedom to the artist to explore expressive resources. Again, social realism does not coincide with the academic and the anecdotal which qualities mark much of our genre as a whole.

Pursuing the problem which such an art poses, this author wrote in a review of the artist's work some observations which may still hold true: "The crux of the matter is for social realist artists who wish to convey certain well-defined values or a particular socio-political standpoint to discover what is *expressive form*. Now, depicting workers in the activity of stacking sugar cane on a cart does not by itself express the artist's values or social orientation — it may simply be the representation of a part of the entire process of sugar production. As such, it may well constitute one picture in a series for a calendar commissioned by agencies such as, perhaps, the Sugar Planters' Association. Per se, it remains a neutral image, which does not go beyond illustration to the expression of value. The valuation of the artist does not come from subject matter alone — it pro-

ceeds from the internal coherence of his work and the expressive quality of his form. Working in genre, the social realist does not merely situate figures in action in an ordinary and perhaps banal landscape of fields and leafy trees, but the very landscape itself should be endowed with a character that furthers the meaning of the work. . . . Figures that are faultlessly drawn, though there is a separate merit in this, are not necessarily expressive, in the same way that a rose scientifically drawn for a botanical treatise is stripped of its richer connotations. What is important is the functionality of all elements of the work towards a unified meaning, a total thought-feeling complex. It is the supreme mark of the artist, for the social realist here in particular that he takes the all-important step above mere imitation or *mimesis* to achieve expressive form. For it is only in the acute awareness of the properties of line, shape, color, texture, value, and space to convey specific qualities, that he is able to convey, with the full potency of the image, the values that he wishes to communicate and to share. What follows then is that he achieves an art of total persuasion, not an art which skims over the surface of things, but one in which he can truly find artistic fulfillment."

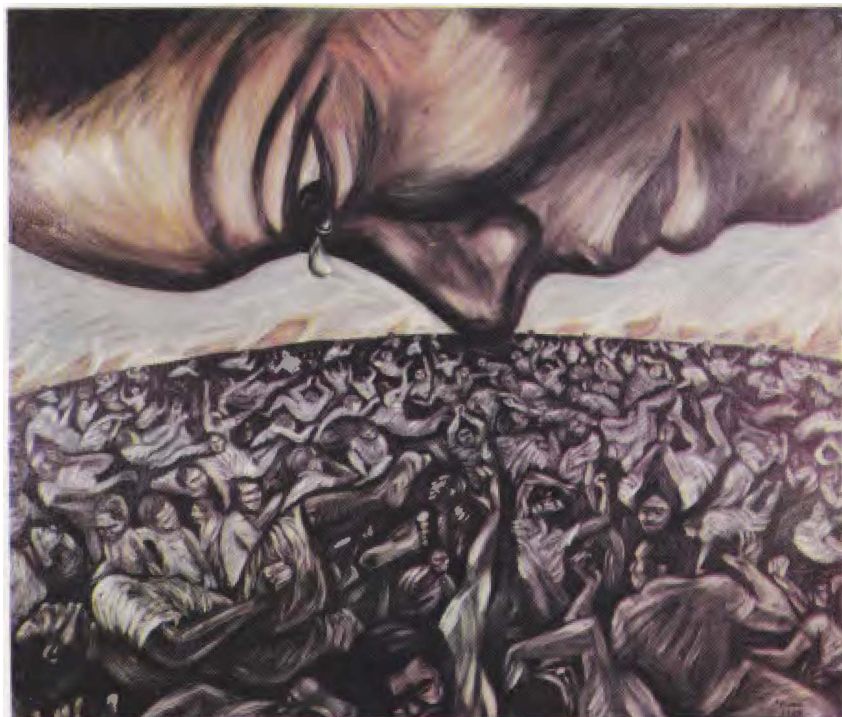
In this particular show at Rear Room Gallery, Papo de Asis' most successful paintings were those which broke away from traditional imagery in favor of a fresher, more innovative approach. A key painting of this period is *Kapital*, a big work which shows workers on two planes, with two men standing frontally in the foreground, while several pull rhythmically on the cables of a machine in the middle-ground. There is a heightened expressiveness in this painting in the relationship of man and machine and in the more refined use of color. The artist's fine draughtsmanship can be put to advantage in the quest for greater expressiveness.

Another important work of the artist is *Third World*, his entry to the 1980 Art Association of the Philippines Annual Painting Competition. Stylistically, this relates to *Kapital* in the strong, affirmative definition of the foreground figure against the background. The central figure of *Third World* is a brown male, his muscular torso signifying labor power, stripped to the waist, kneeling and chained by the wrists like

a bound slave. The realistic, carefully modeled figure is set clearly against a symbolic-expressionistic background of an orange sky filled with fumes from the chimney-stacks of factories, reinforcing the identity of the central figure as worker, while above and behind him, the symbolic spirit of Freedom rendered in the transparent gray tones of the rising smoke raises a clenched fist in the exhortation to struggle and to break the chains of bondage. Its dynamism contrasts with the figure of the bound worker which though static at the moment also suggests a potential of revolutionary energy.

Another key painting of Papo de Asis is *Imperyalismo* which shows a ragged and starving boy holding out an empty plate between the flags of the superpowers. The destructive effect of imperialism, of which the Stars and Stripes are dominant, is signified in the grinning skulls and the death-dealing high-powered weapons. This painting with its well-defined forms in vivid colors combines realism in the figure of the hungry boy, and symbolism in the flags and guns. The widespread phenomenon of hunger in the Third World is viewed in the context of imperialism which exploits and ravages the resources and economy of former colonies and neo-colonies through onerous loans, aid packages, unequal treaties and multinational corporations that stifle local initiative.

From these works, Papo de Asis proceeded to do paintings dealing with more topical issues: the demolition of squatters' shanties, the people's struggle in the city and the countryside. *Tigilan ang Demolisyon* (Halt to Demolition) has a direct, poster-like effect at the same time that it shows the expansion of the artist's visual vocabulary and resources. Familiar is the artist's device of building an image on different planes in order to be able to create a rich synthesis. In this work, the figure of a small girl carrying her baby brother astride a hip (expressive of the early maturity of the poor who are thrown directly into social responsibility and struggle from childhood) unifies the lower plane which shows a large demonstration of urban poor with a streamer bearing the words of the title against a background of slums in a reddening sky, and the upper plane of shanties torn down by a bulldozer. Against predominant blue, the red pool of blood on the ground comes out starkly and



MALUMBAY SI INA

36" X 40" oil on canvas

Pablo Baens Santos

1983



ALAY SA BAGONG BAYANI

36" X 40" oil on canvas

Pablo Baens Santos

1984



KOMPRADOR

36" X 40" oil on canvas

Pablo Baens Santos

1978



JUSTICE UNDER MARTIAL LAW

42½" X 30½" oil on paper

Orlando Castillo

1980



BUKAS ANG WELGA
18" X 24" oil on paper
Orlando Castillo
1975



TIGILAN ANG DEMOLISYON

3" X 4" oil on canvas

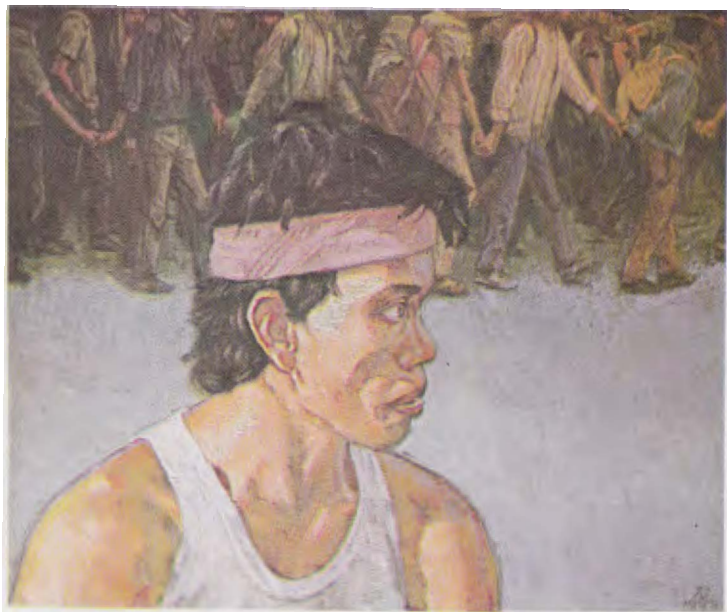
Papo de Asis

1984



STREET MURALS

Executed by several artists



MANGGAGAWA
5" X 6" oil on canvas
Antipas Delotavo
1984



ITAK SA PUSO NI MANG JUAN

24" X 30" water color

Antipas Delotavo





REAGAN

30" X 48" oil on canvas

Neil Doloricon

1984



HANAP AY LAYA

6" X 8" oil on canvas

Edgar Fernandez

1984



GAWA: MAKATOTOHANAN

5" X 6" oil on canvas

Edgar Fernandez

1976

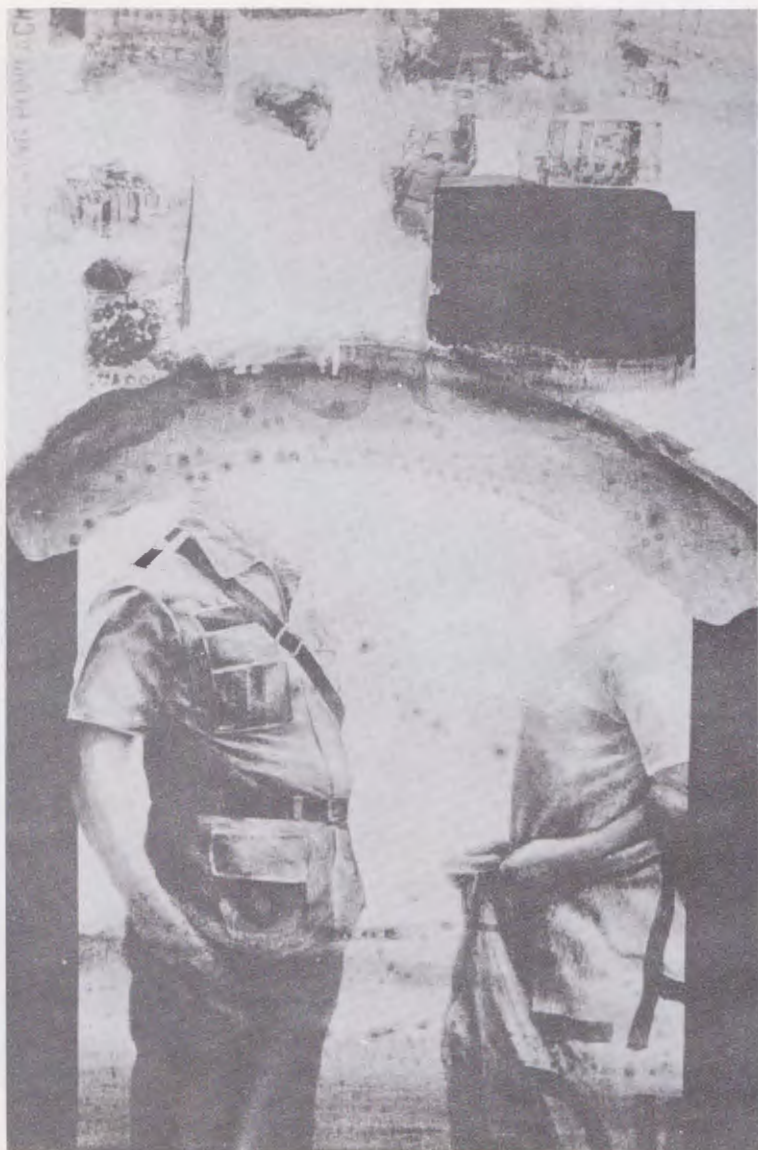


DULANG BAYAN

48 $\frac{1}{4}$ " X 60" oil on canvas

Renato Habulan

1983



SA PULA SA PUTI
24" X 36" oil on canvas
Renato Habulan
1987

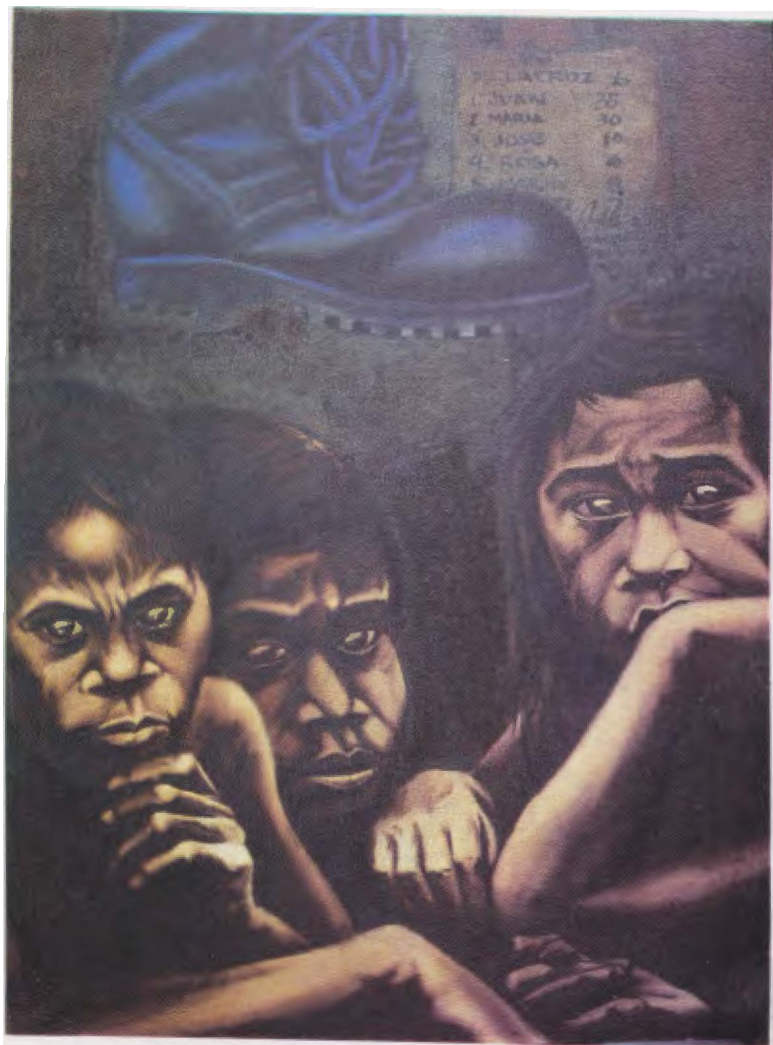


PANANAW NI HIPPOCRATES

15" X 20" watercolor

Al Manrique

1976



ANG MABUHAY SA TAKOT

20" X 28" oil on canvas

Al Manrique

1983



MGA NAGNININONG KAY NENENG

60" X 48" oil/acrylic on canvas

Jose Tence Ruiz

1985

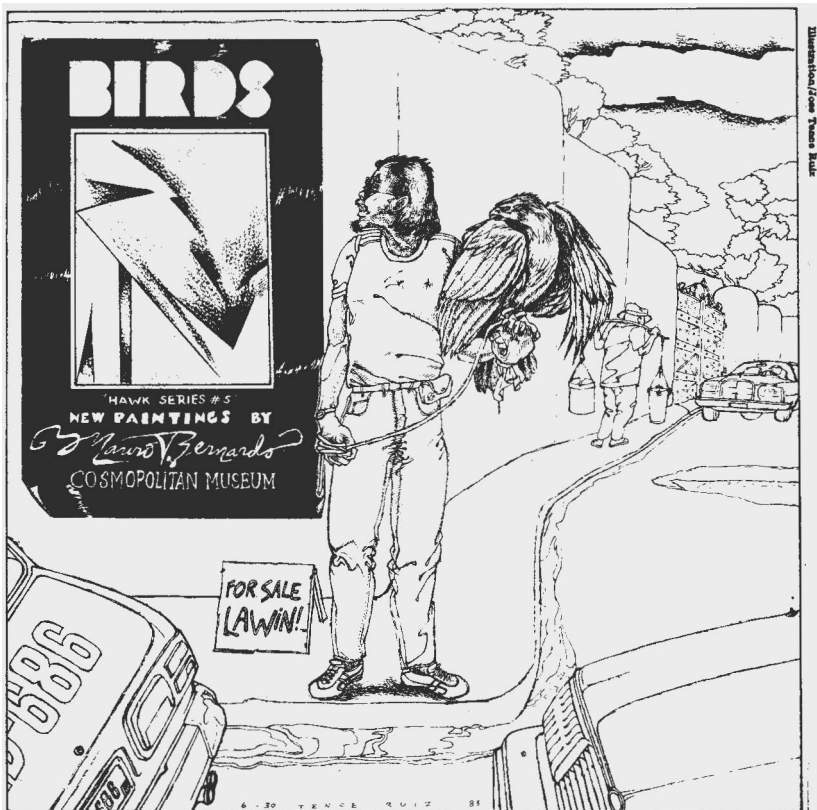


Illustration / Jose Tence Ruiz

Illustration (WHO magazine, 1983)
Jose Tence Ruiz



1081

12" X 10" etching/aquatint

Ben Cabrera



PAMILYANG MAGSASAKA

Nunelucio Alvarado



RESURRECTION

Edicio de la Torre

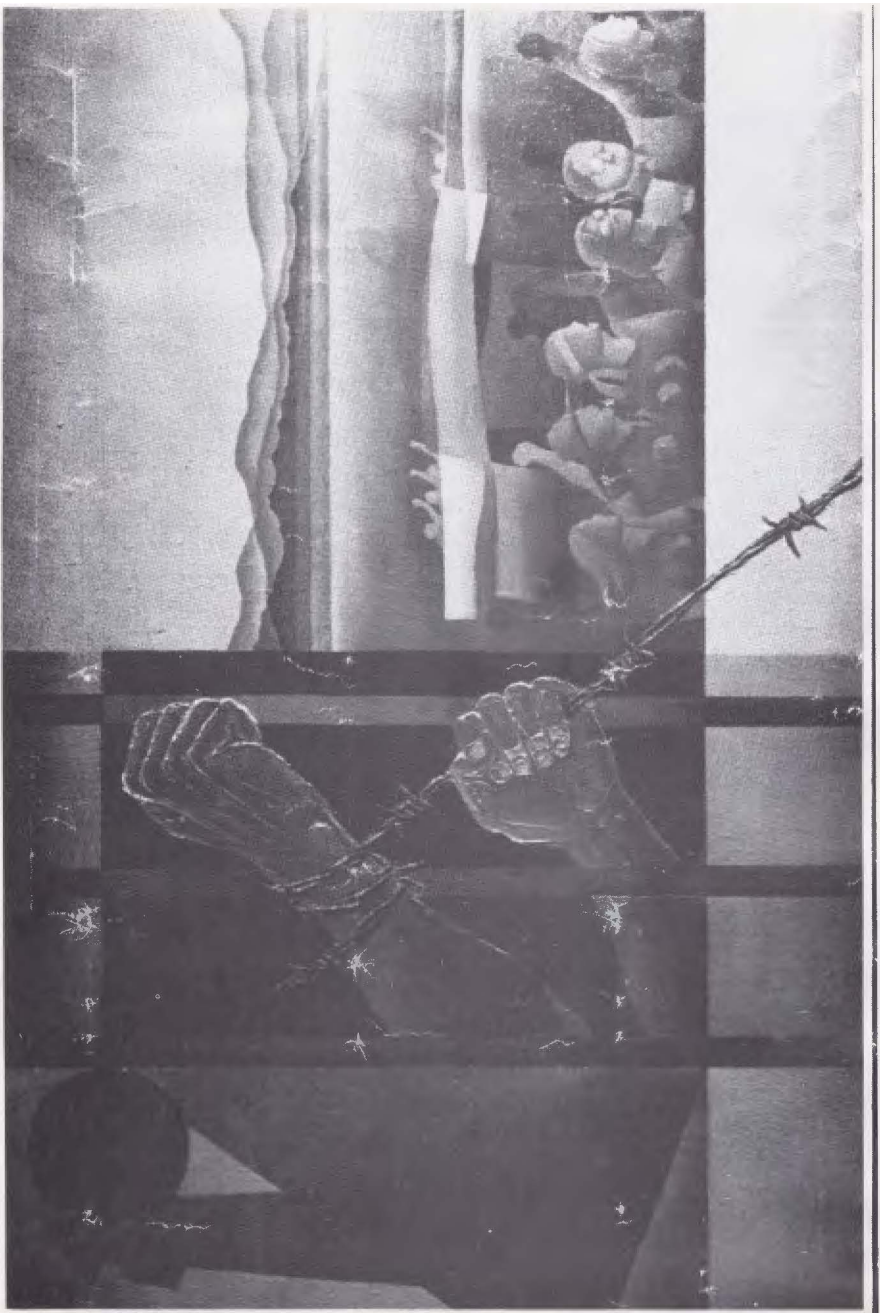


TUNOK SA DAHON

Oil on canvas

Nunelucio Alvarado

1986



PUMIPIGLAS (Camp Bagong Diwa, Bicutan)
Oil on canvas
Noel Etabag
1984



HULAGPOS

96" X 72" mixed media

Imelda Cajipe-Endaye

1986



ILLUSTRATION

Pen-and-ink

Danny Dalena

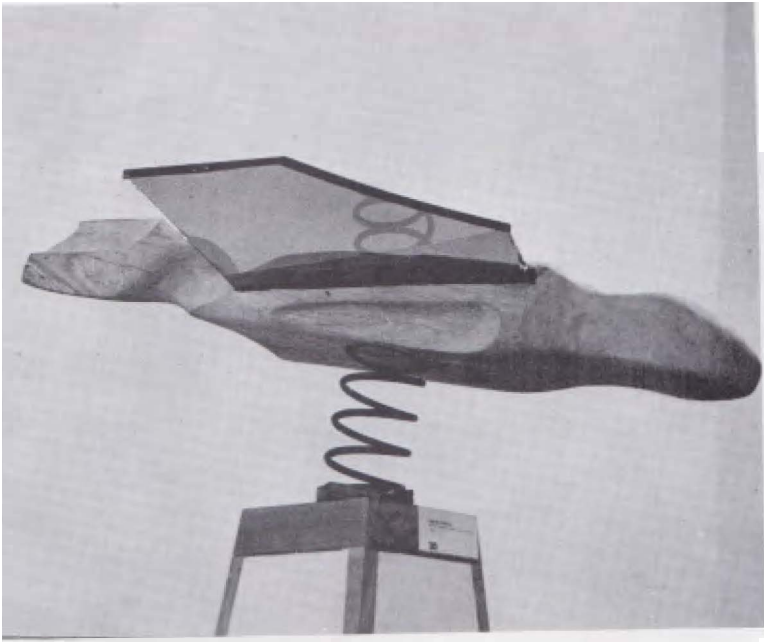


TURNING HEIRLOOMS INTO COMMODITIES

24" X 18¾"

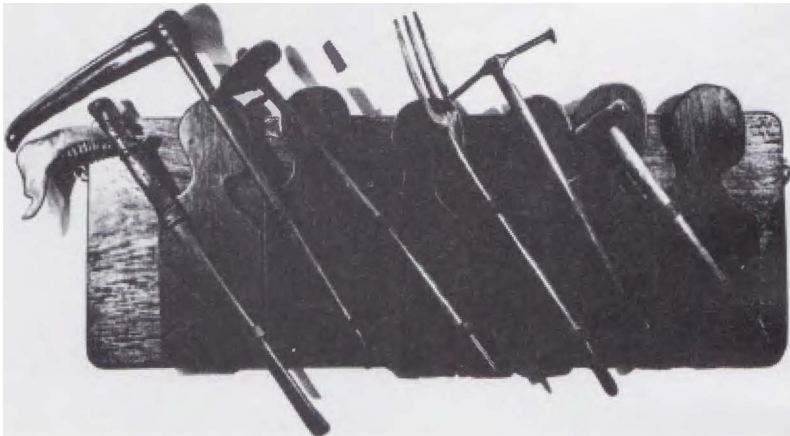
Ana Fer.

1983



IBON

wood and plexiglass
Gerry Araos



AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

Wood and metal
Rey Paz Contreras



Illustration for ULOS



ANTI-IMPERIALIST MURAL
In Progress



TORTURE AND DEATH

4" X 8" molave

Rey Paz Contreras

1986

Collegian
Features **Folio**
J U L Y 1986



Illustration

Angelo "Boboy" Betco



BAYAN KOMIX
Arnel Agawin

PINAGTIBAY NG IMPERYALISMONG E.U. ANG
 IBAT'IBANG BATAS PARA SUGPUIN ANG
 REBOLUSYONARYONG PAKIKIBAKA NG MASA.
 ALINSUNOD SA TINATAWAG NILANG BATAS SA
 PANUNULISAN, ITINURING NA BANDIDO ANG MGA
 MANPIRGMANG PILIPINO. NILAPATAN SILA, AT
 ANG MGA TUMUTULONG SA KANILA, NG
 PARUSANG KAMATAYAN O NAPAKAHABANG-
 PANAHONG PAGKABILANGGO.



ITINAKDA NG BATAS SA
 SEDISYON NA PAPATAYIN O
 IPIPIIT NANG MATAGAL ANG
 SINUMANG NANAWAGANG IPAG-
 LABAN ANG INDEPENDENSYA NG
 PILIPINAS. ITINAPON SA GUAM
 ANG MGA ANTI-IMPERYALISTA.
 TULAD NI MABINI, NA TUMANG-
 GING MANUMPA NG KATAPATAN
 SA MGA MANANAKOP.



IKINULONG NG HUKBO
 NG E.U. ANG MGA
 NAGSUSULAT AT NAGTA-
 TANGHAL NG MGA
 REBOLUSYONARYONG
 AKDA AT LIKHANG-SI-
 NING. IPINAGBAWAL PA
 ANG PAGLALAPLAP NG
 BANDILANG PILIPINO.



Lipunan at Rebolusyong Pilipino in comics

vividly, the only other colors being the gaudy billboards of the buildings in the distance. An interesting and innovative element consists of two male figures in transparent blue tones that merge with the background signifying a plane of reality beyond the physical. The two seem to sadly contemplate and watch over the scene of demolished houses and spilled blood. Are they the slain victims, the spirit of protest that lives on despite the systematic and inhuman destruction? The artist has used the same device of transparent figures to depict the struggle in the countryside. Visually striking, it is open to a multiplicity of interpretations: as the spirit of protest, aspiration and struggle which sustains the people despite physical reverses, as the invisible but active element of the people's forces which merges into the setting as fish into a large sea, as the spirit and memory of the heroic dead who live on in men's minds, or as the emerging progressive forces soon to achieve full reality.

As a social realist, Papo de Asis, while having done many of his important works in oil on canvas, is strongly cognizant of the necessity of working in media and forms that reach a larger audience. The powerful and heroic temper that has consistently informed his most recent works has found full expression in portable murals and large-scale works, often executed with the participation of fellow artists and apprentices. He is well known and appreciated for the stamina that he pours into his work, especially in issue-oriented murals dealing with human rights and the theme of people's solidarity. His many-sided artistic talent has recently found a new expression in the performing arts where he plays heroic roles with much enthusiasm.

**TARMAC**

3" X 4" oil on canvas

Papo de Asis

1984

ANTIPAS DELOTAVO

Another award-winning social realist is Antipas "Biboy" Delotavo who was born in 1954 in Iloilo City. He obtained his artistic education at the PWU and has enriched it through countryside exposures and foreign travels. In joining the Center for the Advancement of Young Artists, he also became one of the original members of the *Kaisahan* group. Aside from his work as a full-time painter, he also does photography as journalistic documentation or as aid to his art.

Portraiture whether in dry brush watercolor, or oil, is the forte of artist Delotavo, although he is farthest from being a society painter of privileged subjects. He held his first one man show at the Art Associates in 1977 and won critical attention by his outstanding watercolor painting entitled *Kapos*, grand prize winner in the 1979 AAP Annual Competition. Here seven figures of men and women of the working class, cropped below the waist and set against the unmarked white space of paper, advance into the viewer's space. Social comment takes a striking and original form in the principal figure in the center foreground who engages the viewer with an intense scrutinizing look as he clutches a non-existent bag of groceries, a blank but well-defined negative shape between his arm and chest. His subjects are drawn from the anonymous crowd in the way that a roving photographer at the corner of Carriedo and Santa Cruz would single out a face among the moving crowds while they passed unaware or absorbed in thought or as they turned to look with a lightly puzzled, ironic glance. Delotavo draws sensitive portraits, each face focused separately, marked with the vulnerability of the oppressed but growing into a practical hardiness with age and experience in survival.

There is an underlying melancholy in many of the portraits, as in that of the old man with the bent shoulders and a forgotten hat on his head as he goes his lonely way with a paper bag lunch in hand, or the man in a grimy t-shirt waiting for a ride, or the old arthritic in rubber shoes stiffly dozing in a broken rattan armchair. The portraits of youth, however, have a latent optimism, even in that of the garbage-picker with his *bayong*

who sets out on his morning foray with a casual, hopeful step on the hard pavement of streets lined by rotting galvanized sheets that conceal decrepit shacks. A street punk in shorts, with cigarette dangling loosely from a corner of the mouth, sizes one up with a half-amused half-ironic expression as he stands against the rotting boards of the urban slums.

With artistic economy of means, Delotavo creates an entire environment: the sights, textures and smells of the city. Background to the figures are the boards and galvanized sheets with abstract random patterns of human grime and weather stains, the walls marked by half-effaced clandestine graffiti, the billboards advertising multinational products, the litter of empty boxes and the urban refuse of a captive consumer society, even newspaper pages that give witness to the daily unfolding of the historical process. In *Itak sa Pusong ni Mang Juan*, the sharp-bladelike thrust of the Coca-Cola sign seems to stab the old man's heart, drained of life and vigor. In *Ang Walang Malay* (The Innocent One), an infant bundled in a striped folk blanket rests its head on a newspaper with the blaring headline "Escaped cons killed," alluding to the violent forces that await the innocent in the world outside.

His following show of oils in 1978 and 1979 at the Ma-Yi Gallery continued with portraits in oil, again of men and women of the urban poor against a background of whitewashed walls with traces of graffiti, the theme of the *Kalburow* series. These portraits acquire a renewed intensity and a more compelling psychological truth as they emerge from a dark or neutral background. Much of their strength lies in the contrast between the realism of the human face expressing a gamut of feelings concentrated in a look or sideward glance and the gestural treatment in the spontaneous and painterly handling of the paint medium with abstract elements such as rectangles of shadow indicated by expressionist brushwork. This gestural approach as in *Ang Tindera*, blurs contours and suggests movement in a condition of alertness and sensitivity to the environment. The tonal patches of shadow apart from the figure imply doors, windows, walls and serve to indicate the background of urban grime and squalor, the menace and uncertainty of an urban existence. Likewise, the abstract elements

lend an evocative quality and psychological depth to the work, as the human figures themselves, like few portraits by others, while they have an intense particularity, also have that enigmatic quality of soul. The theme of the exploitation of woman first appears in 1979 in such a painting as *Ang Puhunan* in which a woman in a shawl at the left against a heavy curtain seems to be waiting while on the white empty space on the right is the fine sketch of a standing nude of classical elegance except for its casually crossed ankles, an image alluding to the skin trade. Also in this period is the theme of worker and machine, with the huge machine looming above the worker as symbol of the oppressive system. Again, the style which combines realism with a gestural approach precludes literalism and instead favors evocative depth.

In mid 1982, Delotavo, in his show *Bayaning Di-Kilala*, again at the Ma-Yi Gallery, showed an expanded range of subject matter, with the artist leaving city for countryside, particularly the sprawling sugar haciendas of Central Luzon. Interestingly enough, this new series was done after the artist's tour of Europe for winning the Grand Prize in the 1979 AAP Watercolor Competition. While many artists after a stint abroad come back with travelogues and landscapes marked by European influence in style and content, Delotavo has not been shaken from his roots in our Third World reality. Parisian boulevardiers and fashion mannequins are many worlds apart from the *sakadas* and laundresses of Philippine sugarlandia, his present subject. Is it with a new poignancy that he meets the workers, the *cargadores* of cane stalks, the train operators, the machinists and their wives and children with them? He calls them *Mga Bayaning Di-Kilala*, heroes unknown and unsung, the country's productive forces, but more victims than heroes, who must at some time come into their own.

In dry brush watercolor, his art draws intimately from reality and subsequently transforms it into a quintessential image of man in the conditions of his labor. The monochrome tones of ochre are so much the color of earth and of sweaty sun-baked skin; the light that lends sparkle to the eyes or that streaks the working clothes is so much of the summer sun blazing in the open fields. Artist Delotavo is as always the con-

summate watercolorist: the light washes of color with their random markings become the grime and the soot or the shifting patterns of light and shadow on the side of a company train. In *Numero Uno*, the number of a locomotive for transporting cane, a worker protected from the glare by a cloth bound around his head and the lower part of his face casts a sideward look, his eyes smarting from the sun as from a long-held sorrow. Beside a makeshift fence of dried tree branches a graying worker, his life's breath struggling like a wounded bird in the cage of his worn frame, hangs ragged clothes to dry in *Nahambing sa Basahan* (Likened to a Rag). The young, however, still unbroken, are full of hope, as on a morning before the day's work, a young worker stands beside the train to wait for his comrades. Youth lends a sparkle to his eye and a half-smile to his lips, his jacket slung jauntily over a shoulder, his line of vision going outside and beyond the picture frame into a larger space and reality where we all meet.

Delotavo's show of oils in September 1983 at the Hiraya Gallery was a milestone in social realism. In the works of this series, he has refocused realism in a style which fuses high aesthetic form with ideological meaning. While some works in his earlier series such as *Kalbuho* may have raised problems concerning the relationship of figure and ground and the internal unity of the two, in these later works, such problems are resolved in a more mature style fully cognizant of its resources. Here the setting itself is an integral part of the theme of construction workers. In the programs of infrastructure and the building boom, construction workers come to the fore as constituting a large group of the work force. A dialectic arises between man as worker, creature of flesh-and-blood and the structures of stone and steel, inhuman and depersonalized. The setting is thus recognizably urban: the scaffoldings and girders, the massive and forbidding structures of power that intimidate and threaten the workers' very existence in all its vulnerability. In the shadows of these buildings, the worker is an unknown and self-effacing entity, *Mga Kaluluwang Di Masinagan* (Souls In Darkness). In their quietness and brooding melancholy, in the gestures and looks that imply an inner restlessness, these are images of the worker's alienation: his labor power constructs

the buildings which in turn oppress him and leave him out in the cold and the shadows. What defense can the worker have against these symbols of power, machines of megalomania? Against the cold stone of the edifices, tomb-like and silent, are the living glances and looks, supplicating, questioning, challenging or speaking—the eyes quick with feeling or the elusive movements of thought; the mouths delicately shaping speech, the expressive gestures of the hands, and the bodies in postures and stances anti-classical and formed by the physical conditions of work and social circumstance. The workers reach out to the viewer with a finely focused human presence, a penetrating reality made even more acute by the implicit sense of struggle, a vital tension coming through. When a worker standing beneath a wall in a momentary pause in his occupation looks out with a life's working experience summed up in his gaze, it is an appeal for solidarity. But, first of all, the contact involves a sharpening of one's consciousness of the reality of a living person entrapped in a social system that would drain him of his energies and depersonalize him into a statistic.

While solid and massive materiality is conveyed by the stone walls and the architecture itself, there is too, on the other hand, the complimentary theme of light and shadow—a dialectic in form as symbol. Thus the blocks of stone wall and supporting columns come into contrast with a sensitive chiaroscuro of tonalities, geometric patterns of light and dark, in the same way that the living and fluid figure of man contrasts with, or is entrapped by, the static architectural forms. In *Piping Tagulaylay* (Mute Lament), the repeated structural features on the upper section seem to weigh down threateningly on the figures of two women and a man, of random, casual gestures that betray an underlying listlessness and anxiety. The intense particularity of the figures of these people of the urban poor create the feeling of humanity repressed but struggling to come through. *Bulong na Umaalingawngaw* (Echoing Whisper) is another important piece, which, like the former, is of large dimensions and mural in concept. Two workers standing beside a scaffolding and against a rectangular space of light make striking figures while a dark and compact silhouette beyond suggests a mass action. The alienation of the worker is further con-

veyed in *Kahariang Walang Landas* (Kingdom without a Road) in its figures of seated workers before a building, their expressions ranging from despondency to militant alertness.

Such an accomplishment as Delotavo's is only possible with an assiduous exploration of aesthetic form, so often overlooked by younger and less mature artists of social orientation who would place the entire burden on content. Delotavo creates on the premises of refinement and restraint, the better to capture the living spark of the spirit. In a pervasive mood of stillness with a latent tension, he endows the figure of the workers with a noble and mournful dignity which does not, however, exclude self-assertion and challenge. As human presences, the figures are neither petrified nor frozen. It is in his style that the artist blurs contours whereby he avoids a sharp and literal delineation that so easily slips into the static, but instead implies a condition that oscillates between stillness and movement. As in his previous works, he treats the figures with a degree of looseness and flexibility, incorporating spontaneous, gestural passages to suggest the fluidity of all life. The brown and warm flesh tones with a tonal richness and depth contrast strikingly with the gray stone structures. It is likewise an achievement that the abstract elements, linear-geometric and tonal light-and-shadow patterns which possess their own visual appeal become integrated into the ideational and symbolic meaning of the work. Abstract elements become transposed into signifiers of the impersonal, the inhuman, the oppressive — and come into direct contrast with the organic, the vital, and the human.

Delotavo's work shows the development and maturation of a social realist artist in his quest for an art of resonance and expressiveness. His style is an advanced form of realism enriched with resources from the vocabulary of abstraction. They constitute a high point in social realism as the artist raises its demands in terms of richness of human meaning and seriousness in aesthetic concerns.

LEONILO DOLORICON

Leonilo "Neil" Doloricon was born in Lanuza, Surigao del Sur, in 1957 but grew up in Manila. Graduating from the University of the Philippines in 1979, he has always sought to enlarge his perception of the national reality by travels in the countryside which brought him to Zamboanga on a fact-finding mission and to the Cordilleras in the north where he attended a peace pact in Betuagan in which the northern groups made a common stand against militarization and the building of the Chico dam which would submerge their ancestral lands. These social and cultural investigations revealed the conditions of the Filipinos, particularly the national minorities, and heightened the artist's political awareness.

It was in 1977 that the direction his art would take became defined with his association with the *Kaisahan* group. Earlier, his artistic concerns had been in exploring materials which led to abstract and experimental works. He also explored the possibilities of collage in a series, *Liwanag sa Dilim* (Light in Darkness), which consisted of works in newspaper collage combined with acrylic passages for tonal interest. In 1976, his first socio-political themes dealt with the Vietnam War and the poverty in Bangladesh. In acrylic with collage, these depicted grim living skeletons in black and gray tones with a blood-red background, gazing reproachfully at the viewer. In 1977, he began to do paintings using old photographs as reference, enlarged and in sepia tones using the device of a frame within a frame to evoke a historical atmosphere, as in the works of Ben Cabrera. This trend exemplifies the social realist use of images from the past, especially of the nineteenth century Propaganda Movement and Revolution, to create a historical resonance with contemporary events, such as in the case of Doloricon's *Tapos na Po Ba ang Rebolusyon?* (Is the Revolution Over?). Also in 1977 the artist did a series on children in acrylic-collage with the use of photo references. This series, while it depicts the vulnerability and innocence of children, also uses the subject to make social comment on romantic-escapist attitudes stemming from an immaturity that has not come to grips with reality. Its collage using comic strips is particularly

apt in suggesting puerile fantasies that make people an easy prey to exploitative structures. Also in this period, Neil Doloricon participated in an interaction mural at the Vinzons Hall depicting contemporary conditions with his fellow members of the UP Artist's Circle. His productivity increased in the numerous political drawings, cartoons and illustrations he did as staff artist of the *Philippine Collegian*, an experience which further geared his art to topical issues of journalistic urgency.

When the artist held his first one-man show at the Hiraya Gallery in 1981, he put to good use his training as staff artist and his experience in social interaction from his wide-ranging travels in the country. With his works, he brought to social realism a new freshness and vigor, as well as removed it from artistic conservatism to which it was in danger of falling. Even more, he firmed up the orientation towards a people-oriented art springing from a genuine solidarity for the toiling peasants and workers. People are the subject of Neil Doloricon's paintings where they are sensitively characterized in the many faces of old and young. In *Sila ang Magpapasya* (They Will Judge), the faces composed in montage to create a counterpoint of associations possess the essential quality of presence, of being able to come through and communicate with the viewer. In the deeply lined faces of the old men and women or in the inquiring eyes of the young are written an entire history of a people's love and sorrow, courage and struggle.

Because of the artist's insistence on observation — which is the basic premise of realist art — and his concern for specificity and particularity of representation — which explains his use of photographs — Doloricon has arrived at a truer characterization of the Filipino as he has shed off the stereotyped images of the Fifties. He has refused to typecast them into the familiar, picturesque, often trite, roles of the *sabungero* with his rooster, vendor of fish and fruit, or the street urchin gawking after a saint on a carroza. He has rejected the folksy and the fiesta of traditional genre, the sunlit planting-rice scenes of Amorsolo and his school, or the sentimental mother-and-child compositions with the magic realist detailing of folk artifacts such as baskets and *bilao*. For one thing, there is nothing caricatural about his representations: the people of the masses are never

made to appear stupid, superstitious, and vacuously sentimental as they go through the traditional feudal gestures and rituals. Instead, these faces have that dimension of spirit so often lacking in portrayals of the laboring peasants and workers. Here, the Filipino is defined in terms of the large majority, and not in those of the privileged classes who often perpetuate an image of the masses as comic or dull-witted.

In his 1981 show, Doloricon's Filipinos are specific and particularized, born out of the artist's immersion in the lives of the peasants and workers: his faces of male and female, young and old, evoke their distinctive voices and manner of speech, as well as their tears, their odors and sweat, and very life's blood itself. And this concreteness is what makes his paintings realist in the original sense of the word, as an art based on the keen observation of reality, of the natural and social environment. His art, however, transcends objective and cold observation; it is rather participation in the concerns of the people portrayed. Thus, the figures are not abstract, generalized types that are more an artist's formula than living persons; neither are they idealized physical types without a specific reality.

His faces also go beyond the usual limitations of portraiture. For one thing, they are not just shown *en face* in formal and frontal presentation. The artist eschews the static and classic finality of traditional portraiture. Instead he presents portraits in transition — an innovation which further enhances the living quality of his subjects, their being part of change, of history in process. This he does by capturing a fleeting, transitory gesture without sacrificing characterization. An old woman covers her mouth in horror, a man cries out, a child weeps bitterly or pleadingly holds out an empty plate. The dynamism of these images comes from the fact that his subjects are not passive and posed, but are in constant active interaction. The artist shows a fine realist grasp of the figure which shifts from his earlier distorted and expressionistic works.

His paintings in acrylic on wood are composed on a long, vertical format, another innovation, sometimes with two panels joined together as a diptych. Along the length of the vertical format, faces or figures are situated as in a montage where

meanings and associations interplay. In *Tess, Alam Mo Ba ang Iyong Ginagawa?* (Tess, Do You Know What You Are Doing?), the open face of an unspoiled young girl at the lower section of one panel is sharply contrasted with the cropped figure of a burlesque dancer covered in areas, as though in shame, by thin transparent fingers, on the second juxtaposed panel. His use of color enhances the emotional expressiveness of the image: blue and rose shading into gray, or green modulating into violet and yellow. The young girl Tess, is drawn from real life, as the artist would say, "*hango sa tunay na buhay*." ("drawn from real life"). In the course of his social investigation, he met this young girl from a family of ten children abandoned by their father, who takes on a job as dancer in a beerhouse to support her brothers and sisters. The plight of this young girl, yet unconscious of exploitation, provided the subject of this work.

A striking feature of Doloricon's work is his style combining acrylic painting with text in the form of collages from newspaper clippings, headlines, fragments, or even hand-inscribed lines from the poetry of Ka Amado Hernandez. His collages are not random fragments but function as commentary to the images. As such, the function of the collages is to enhance the effect of topicality and up-to-the-minute relevance, as well as to evoke the surrounding social ambience, indeed, the entire contemporary society in which the figures live and move. The themes cover a wide range of contemporary social concerns, from the exploitation of women in tourist bars to brutality and discrimination in the U.S. bases. In *Huling Balita* (The Latest News), a worker slain in a strike lies on the ground beside his placard. The same subject is treated in *Wanted: Dead or Alive* in which a mother and child in the foreground gaze out searchingly, while a slain worker is sprawled behind them, with a text bearing the swastika Nazi symbol as an allusion to fascist repression. In a smaller acrylic work, a man with strips of shirt barely covering his weathered back is juxtaposed beside clippings on multinational corporations and the summary dismissal of striking workers. In another, a picture of film star Nora Aunor with clippings from frivolous fan magazine articles makes a striking contrast to a hungry, crying child, the stark image of poverty. Or there is the man, bolo sheathed at his waist, walking away

carrying two big rattan baskets on a pole slung over his shoulder, one containing the sum of his worldly possessions, the other containing a child, while a montage of clippings on the ejection of squatters and the displacement of communities in the building of dams and nuclear plants provides the bleak background. *Lakas Paggawa* (Strength of Labor) conveys its message by the collage of slickly colored ads and logos of multinational products beside the figures of factory workers.

In the last two years, Neil Doloricon has been occupied with popular visual forms such as magazine illustrations, editorial cartoons, and comics, as well as large portable murals on cheesecloth executed collectively for public display in workers' conferences. In painting, he has pursued his experimentation with materials to discover fresh and more effective approaches to socio-political themes. He has continued working in acrylic on canvas with woodbacking and in watercolor with acrylic, and has recently shifted to oil in big mural-size works. In *Hinagpis* (Grief), he creates a montage of meaningful images, this time not in diptych, but in irregularly shaped wooden panels of different sizes joined together at angles. The large panel at far right shows three young men carrying the bloodied body of a comrade killed in a strike; the central panel contains the figure of a young boy squatting to eat from his meager share of rice laid out on a piece of paper on the ground, while on the narrower left panel a mother clasps her child and hungry children look out accusingly. Again, Doloricon incorporates text into the images by quotations from the poetry of Ka Amado Hernandez. This is one painting in which the artist explicitly portrays violence, though here it is its aftermath in the bleeding body which may hurt tender sensibilities in its gory aspect. *Itaas ang Sakhod* (Raise Wages), the artist's first oil work, shows the influence of Carlos "Botong" Francisco in its pastelly colors and flat, poster-like effect. The work represents a confrontation between workers on strike and riot police on one level, while on an upper level are ranged a court of evilly grinning judges, green and violet of face to signify corruption. The harmonious and rhythmic style of Carlos Francisco may not quite jibe with the temperament of this artist with his usually stark and intense perceptions of social reality. Recently, Neil Doloricon has pro-

duced a series of black and white pastels, mostly portraits of workers and peasants against a background of crisis and struggle.

Neil Doloricon's art situates the Filipino in the context of contemporary events, as they occur with newsreel rapidity and portend change. In his work, Doloricon rejects previous bourgeois images of the Filipino masses as gawking simpletons, simpering, superstitious oafs or generalized abstractions, but endows the peasant and worker with the dignity and humanity that is their due.



ITAAS ANG SAHOD

6" X 8" oil on wood

Neil Doloricon

1983

EDGAR TALUSAN FERNANDEZ

Edgar Talusan Fernandez (he sometimes signs as Talusan) was born in 1955 in Caloocan City. He obtained his art education from the PWU College of Fine Arts where he majored in commercial art and interior design. He was soon to realize that his real talent lay in painting, and from his first works in 1974, he has emerged in ten years to be one of the most productive social realists with a wide thematic range and a wealth of creative resources.

Before the awakening of his political consciousness, Edgar "Egay" Fernandez was already making his mark in the art scene as a young abstractionist of promise. His earliest abstract series, *The Life and Ways of Man* was exhibited in 1974 for his first one-man show sponsored by the Community Chest. In 1975 he was doing shaped canvases which he called "modular paintings" because the geometric components, such as squares, rectangles, parallelograms and triangles, could be arranged and rearranged at will in new compositions. His abstract style, as in *Dapit Hapon ng Isang Kaayusan* (Afternoon of an Order), played on the edges of shapes in which he effected striking contrasts between hard-edge geometrism and random "torn" effects, combined with exquisite modulations of tone and opaque transparent positive/negative interplay. Through such a style he created an imaginary space which alluded to horizon, sky and cloud ordered into sections that played on a fascinating ambiguity of planarity and recession. It was in this abstract style in which he worked from 1974 to 1976 through a number of one-man shows and first prizes, at Buglas Gallery in Bacolod, at the Ateneo Art Gallery and at the Art Associates that he won the grand prize in 1976 in the painting contest of "Civilization" sponsored by Compro Philippines held in connection with Sir Kenneth Clark's television series of that title.

When he joined the Centre for the Advancement of Young Artists in 1976, he became associated with a number of young artists of socio-political orientation who formed the *Kaisahan* group. At first alternating between abstraction and figuration, he came out with figurative works of a surprising virtuosity in figuration, as they successfully integrated elements from his

abstract style. At least two closely related paintings of this period express the aspiration of youth growing and ascending by means of study and work into enlightenment, in one work symbolized by a blazing source of light sending down streams and rivulets to the thirsting youth. In *Gawa-Makatotohanan*, (1976), the shapes of a girl in modulating blue-violet tones and a boy in yellow-green at first half-reclining on the ground scattered with books (political writer and poet Amado V. Hernandez' *Mga Ibong Mandaragit*), a camera and a skull, symbol for science, and other devices of learning, slowly rise, the figures modulating from opaque to transparent against an upward-branching tree, until they stand to view the shining light that reaches them beyond the confines of their cell-like space. The composition of the painting is based on the geometric structuring device which he had used in his abstracts, creating surreal feeling in the alternate affirmation/negation of materiality. The character of the work is clearly symbolic, as well as heroic, but the stylistic resources called into play lend a freshness of treatment to the theme of youth's quest.

From this he proceeded in 1977 to 1978 to do experimental work in three dimensional form and relief. He did the *Kamay* (Hand) series in wood reliefs as well as a related series of relief figures, including *Ang Manggagawa* (The Worker) suggesting the dehumanization of the worker in the static doll-like aspect of the hooded figure. A three-dimensional work which caused a stir was *Kinupot* (Smothered). Though the concept was derived from the American artist Christo's *empaquetage* or wrapping up, the work in which a white sheet tightly smothers a group of struggling figures conveyed the theme of political repression in the context of the times quite vividly and uniquely. This period was marked not only by the experimentation with artistic resources but also by the exploration of the national reality when he joined a group to do social interaction and visual research among the cultural communities. This valuable experience among the Bontocs of the scenic Cordillera village of Sagada overlooking the rice terraces inspired a series of paintings on the brave and hardy people and their culture, in which abstract framing devices combined with transparency and tonal modulation suggest the interpenetration of past and present, of memory and unfolding experience. In these paintings the artist

makes an implicit appeal for solidarity with the national minorities in their struggle to preserve their ancestral lands and cultural patrimony.

From here Fernandez proceeded to the *Kuyom* (Supressed) series for his one-man show in 1979. This consisted of acrylic paintings and works executed in a photographic darkroom technique. The paintings make use of abstract textures to suggest stained and cursorily whitewashed walls marked by clandestine political graffiti as brooding wraithlike figures emerging from the dark question and reproach, as in *May Buhay sa Looban*. In *Paalala ni Lola*, the anti-nuclear theme is conveyed in the image of the grandmother, her premonitions of nuclear holocaust mushrooming into crimson convolutions of fire and blood. But in most of the paintings of the series, there is the muted quality (the *kuyom* of the title) of figures half emerging in a dusky twilight. Like ghostly presences, they warn or reproach, but even their anger becomes a solitary gesture in the shadows; a repressed spirit barely breaks through the dense fog of traditional passivity and resignation to conscious affirmation. In the photographs, Fernandez worked in a technique in which the photographic film is partially immersed in solution, creating an efflorescence or soft implosion of mysterious shapes, submerged colonies of sea anemones and coral. These forms are suffused with glowing blues, reds, and oranges that evoke suppressed, subliminal impulses that rise but barely touch the surface of open consciousness. Up to this series, the work of Edgar Fernandez has been marked by an allusive quality: hints and clues glowing in the dark, hidden gestures, quiet phantoms, riddles and metaphors—more in the lyrical vein than of the full-blooded vigor of social realism. He himself considers these works as transitional but constituting a necessary phase before the full maturation of his concepts.

In 1980, he evolved new themes for his show at the Rear Room Gallery. The concept of shrouded figures in the three-dimensional *Kinupot* became translated into painting in the imagery of the Philippine flag or a red flag draping or enveloping figures as a death shroud for slain freedom fighters, an imagery to be incorporated into later works. An important theme of the period was the Mother-and-child which finds its

first full expression in *Bagong Umaga*. The Mother cradling a babe in her arms stands on a red field the color of blood with a skull at her feet and a peasant's bolo thrust into the ground, a sacred vow. In a large section of the background, the dawn rises gloriously radiating forth rays of crimson in the skies. The mother of distinctly Malayan features becomes *Inang Bayan* in a period of historical crisis, and the various elements are symbols completing the iconography of the artist. This was accompanied by the text: "*Ang mag-ina at ang liwayway. Isang kina-bukasan ng katotohanan at karangyaan ng Pag-asa.*" Also in the same period, Fernandez takes on the theme of peasant and worker in such a painting as *Punla at Lakas*. In this painting the figures of peasant and worker are merged by means of a circular whirling pattern implying the movement of the working process as the background of field and factory are superimposed in transparent interpenetrating planes, a device borrowed from surrealism.

The following year 1981, Edgar Fernandez won a travel grant to France and Europe, an experience which, instead of sidetracking him from contemporary social issues, engaged him even further. He found a new aspect of the workers' struggle in the Filipino migrant workers in France which he dealt with in the *Metro* series exhibited in Paris. He created images of loneliness and alienation in the solitary figure of the Filipina worker against the dark tunnels of the Paris subway, which as a feature of the urban metropolis also becomes an effective symbol of the quest for one's humanity and liberation. Through interviews with them he understood the workers' plight and was thus able to give it visual expression in eloquent and concentrated images.

Back home in 1982, he rediscovered the tropical environment of his country with new eyes and he did a number of landscapes of the countryside, such as *Sangkalibutan* and *Sa Kanayunan*. These are paintings of the pristine beauty of fields, groves, and ricelands with a lyricism that derives from the very forms and rhythms of nature itself. The quiet realism of these paintings is modified however, by such devices as the sectioning frame that implies another dimension, the superimposed gestural strokes that sometimes go beyond the frame

and that hint at another level of reality, a spiritual presence, if not the artist's own hand in its creative impulse, as well as the random textural passages achieved through decalcomania that affirm the painting itself as a material reality over the realistic image of the landscape. These landscapes, however, are effortlessly integrated into a social context in the *Jeepney* series where the popular conveyance marked *Katas ng Saudi*, an allusion to migrant workers, faces a winding country road stained with red the color of blood in the foreground, again symbolic of the suffering of migrant workers. In many of his landscapes, the artist makes use of the symbolism of the long winding road leading to the future suffused in the serene blue of peace, while the foreground of the present is stained with red.

The last two years have been the most productive for the artist who produced a number of major works in the fervid climate of this period which has seen the heightening of social and political issues, such as censorship, increased foreign economic control, the nuclear plant issue. Within the short period, Fernandez participated in a group show at Genesis Gallery, and at the Ateneo Art Gallery and held two one-man shows, the first at Hiraya and the second at the Hidalgo Gallery of new works showing a number of developments and directions. The Mother-and-Child theme is developed in at least three major works: *Bagong Sibol*, *Mag-Ina*, and *Hanap ay Laya*. The first *Bagong Sibol*, uses a new color scheme achieving a coloristic resonance as it eschews the primary red fields of the earlier work. Again incorporating the device of the frame present in *Bagong Umaga* and in many of his important paintings, the artist is able to imply multiple dimensions in one image in which the emergent present and the future order of man are superposed. The work has a renewed emotional intensity in the quasi-baroque drama of light and shadow that renders the hues even more vividly. Textual references have always played a significant part in his work and here a verse accompanies it: "*Ikaw ay bukas,/ Bituin sa langit ng iyong pagsilang,/ Tubusin mo ang liwanag sa dilim/ Huwag titigil hanggat hindi sumisikat ang kalayaan/ Pagkat ito rin ang pangarap ng iyong Ama/ Isang Itak na sa bato'y nakataga.*" ("You are tomorrow, Star in the sky of your birth, Redeem the light from the darkness, Do not

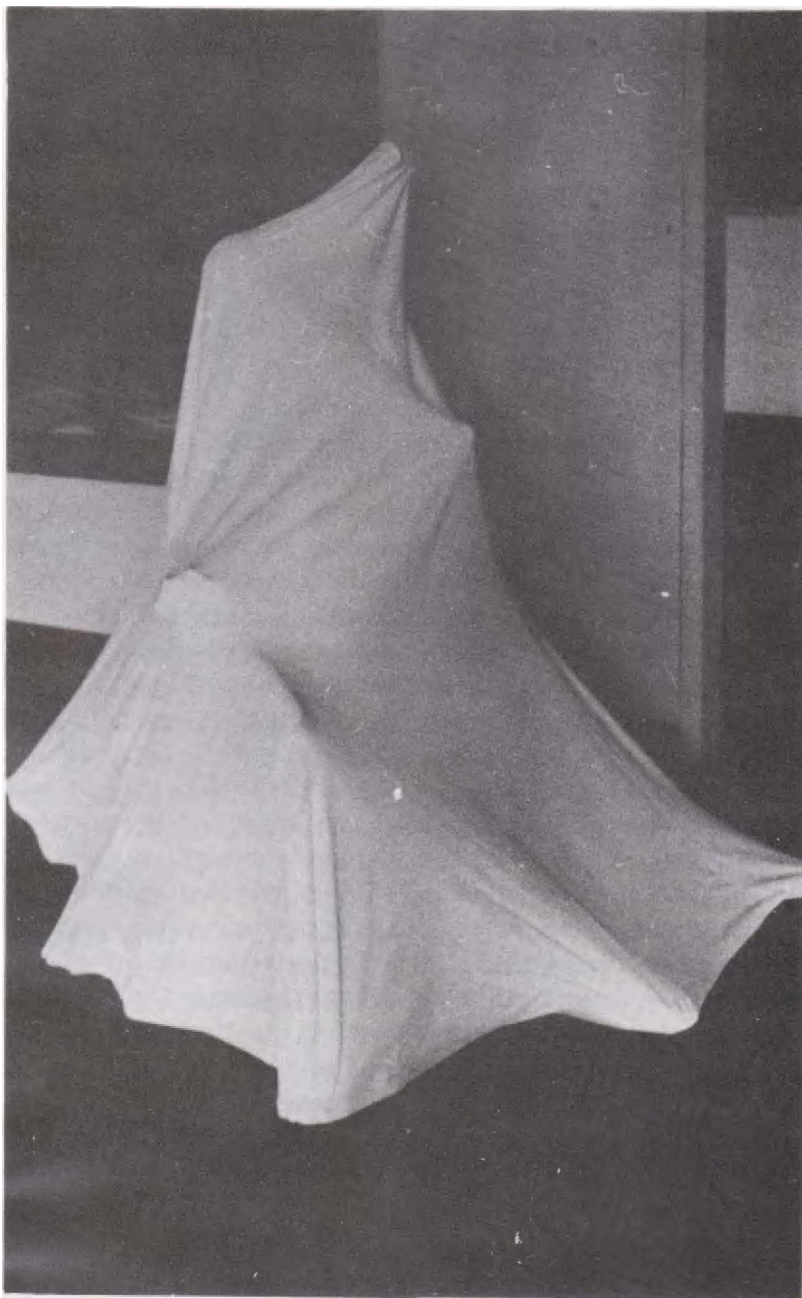
rest so long as freedom does not yet shine, For this is your father's vow — a peasant's blade cleaving rock.'"). The verses imply the absence of the father. Where is he? And why is a weapon thrust in the ground among the skulls, in the native manner of a sacred vow? In this work and in succeeding mother-and-child paintings, the concept of the quest for freedom becomes integral to the theme, with the birth of the child promising its future attainment. In the several versions of *Mag-Ina*, the seated mother cradling the child has her back turned to the viewer in a bent pose, with hair streaming down her back reminiscent of romantic depictions of woman as frail victim of circumstance. In one version, she sits within a framed abstract space under an arch of blue; in another she is surrounded by a dark forest silhouette in which combatants are hidden in the bamboo foliage. *Hanap Ay Laya* (In Search of Freedom) is a 1983 masterpiece of the artist who has developed the mother-and-child image into a fully realized symbol of the ideals of freedom and nationalism. *Inang Bayan* now standing with child at the center of the painting, is an affirmation of the Filipino identity in its *kayumanggi* beauty, her face haloed by the foliage of a radiant tree in the immense rising sun. While she wears a simple camisa top, her skirt is the drapery of the flag in supple folds of clear red, blue and white, which in the center of the figure metamorphoses into a landscape with a luminous winding river leading into a serene horizon: the goal of freedom and justice for all. The skull resting on the white folds on the foreground symbolizes the sacrifices to be made in the struggle. All in all, it is a moving vision, merging humanistic values, religious feeling, and nationalistic fervor as it is a visual synthesis of the people's aspirations in this difficult period of our history.

The artist as witness of the times responds to current issues in a number of works. The painting *Scene 868 Take 1* which combines elements of the film industry, such as camera and film strips, conveys protest against the tightening censorship in the cinema, the media, and in all areas of culture. In *Pandora ng Karunungan*, the artist draws from the Chinese artistic tradition in a black-and white painting as vertical hanging scroll. Its direct and graphic simplicity, however, brings it close to the poster: scientific knowledge can be a Pandora's box which, as

in the painting, releases a mushrooming cloud of nuclear destruction on the countryside. The religious theme is explored in *Ako'y Nauuhaw* (I Thirst) in which two images are superimposed: the figure of the Crucified Christ with his head hung low in thirst and pain and the wooden planks surrounding and concealing to public view the rotting shanties of the slums, an image drawn from his *Kupot* series. The superimposition identifies Christ with the poor and oppressed as human sympathy creating a new order is the water that will quench his thirst and give renewed life to the long-suffering masses. The transparency and the ethereal blue tones create a spiritual feeling.

Events have played an important part in the artist's work. One such event is the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino at the international airport. *Martsa ng Bayan Para sa Katotohanan, Katarungan at Kalayaan* alludes to this event in the cropped image of marching feet from all walks of life in the upper section, as below lies a body wrapped in a yellow shroud while a soft rain of calligraphic confetti falls upon it. (Yellow is the color associated with Aquino because of his welcoming song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon" which turned into mourning). It is striking how naturally the image of the shrouded figure in *Kinupot* and his subsequent flag and red shroud series assume new meanings in the yellow shrouded figure present in a number of his works surrounding the event and the marches and processions held in its connection. In a recent work, *Arko ng Pagkakaisa* (Arch of Unity) figures representing the peasantry, working class, intellectuals, petty bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie with two children come together in the united front to pay homage to a slain martyr shrouded in the flag. There is realistic particularization in the treatment of the figures but literal detail does not obtrude nor detract from the unity of the work. The arch as a framing device further unifies the figures at the same time that it lends a graceful movement; the clarity of color, and its delicate modulations create a light and luminous atmosphere, and the uncluttered purity of the forms give a classical nobility to the visual statement.

In his art, Edgar Fernandez assumes the authentic role of an artist of our time: to be witness to contemporary events and to take up the cause of the people in art, as he develops a personal idiom that realizes his vision.

**KINUPOT**

5" X 4" X 4" cloth on wood

Edgar Fernandez

1977

RENATO HABULAN

One of the youngest of the group, Renato Habulan was born in Tondo in 1953 of working class parents. It was as a student of fine arts at the University of the East that he was exposed to the world of art and ideas through books and museums. It was also then, however, that he perceived a contradiction between the beauty and sophistication of the world of culture and the deprivation of his day-to-day reality, the mean streets of Tondo at the waterfront. This contradiction was yet unresolved when he participated in his first group show in 1973 at the *Galerie Bleue*. He realized with some amount of frustration that his paintings in which he tried to interpret subjects from his childhood in an abstract idiom did not connect with the viewing public. At the same time, he also realized the pitfalls of patronage art and sought to break away from it by joining young artists who shared the same problems. Such a group was *Banaag* (Sunrise) which included Michael Riparip, Edwin Coscolluella, and himself. The group expressed its orientation in a manifesto in which it stated its aim to be understood by the masses.

Breaking away from the hold of patrons however well-meaning, Habulan went to live with his grandmother in Isla Puting Bato, the quintessential Tondo. It was there that he began his Sisa series of paintings in which he first found true personal satisfaction in art. The series took a number of years to unfold, from 1974 to 1978, and was exhibited at the Silangan Gallery and at the Ayala Museum show, sponsored by the Centre for the Advancement of Young Artists which he had joined. The paintings of the series *The Silent World of Sisa* (*Sa Lupi ng Katahimikan ni Sisa*) sprang from a personal symbol derived from the anguished and crazed mother of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. In pen and ink with colored washes, these were lyrical mood paintings in monochrome of the loneliness of a woman, a mother bereft of her children as Sisa was, viewing barren landscapes of poverty and deprivation. These were of a symbolic spirit as they aspired to a universal human meaning while rooted in the Philippine experience.

The sponsorship of the Centre for the Advancement of Young Artists opened to him many opportunities for travel in the various provinces, Bicol, Quezon, and Laguna. A grant from the Council for Living Traditions took him to the Mangyans of Mindoro where art, unlike in the cities, was completely integrated with life. His fruitful interaction with Hanunoo resulted in the Mangyan series which conveyed their essential dignity to the awareness of an urban public.

In 1979 with his one-man show entitled *Dulo't Dulo* (Polarities) held at the Rear Room Gallery, he came out with paintings of social import which also undeniably proved his considerable talent in figuration. The title of the series applies to the themes of the paintings which signify the class antagonisms of landlord and tenant, of capitalist and worker. A number of these show *sakadas*, contractual workers in sugar haciendas, bringing their heavy loads of cane to a seated family of landlords, the women elegantly dressed in the traditional *ilustrado* finery of the Maria Clara costume. Striking is the contrast between the two social classes: on one hand, the grimy and bent *sakadas* showing the physical abuse of hours in the open fields under the sun without hope of economic advancement, and on the other hand, the finely attired *ilustrados* in poses of prideful ease. This series brings out the theme of the traditional rule of privilege in Philippine society at the same time that it implies the injustice of a feudal system which perpetuates the exploitation and dehumanization of man by his fellowmen.

The historical dimension of the theme would be pursued in a related series *May Bahid ang Kahapon* (Traces of the Past) which largely consisted of portraits of *ilustrados*, as symbols of foreign influence and economic privilege. The images of these two series developed further into the paintings of the show *Unang Yugto-Lakas* (First Stage-Strength) exhibited at the Ma-Yi Gallery at the Mandarin in 1981. The artist explains the title of the show as referring to stages in terms of content and solutions within the people's struggle for liberation. Again, the images are of conflicting social classes: peasant or field worker and *ilustrado*, but the dialectics now places greater strength and emphasis on the former. The artist also takes this same theme to explore the Filipino identity by placing figures from the ethnic

minorities in juxtaposition with urban personages, reminiscent of some works by Ben Cabrera, in order to pose questions and create ironies. The historical allusions through the period costumes — and in one painting, through a sepia-simulated reproduction of the famous photograph of MacArthur's landing— give the work a sense of the flow of history and the dialectical interplay that gives momentum to the process. The idea of class distinction and contradiction is further brought out by the geometric framing device to section off elements. There is a certain meticulous attention to detail that derives from a fascination with the ilustrado costumes, but this becomes subsumed to the theme. To lend gravity to the subject and enhance its historical implications, the colors are generally subdued, tending to the sepia brown of old photographs, except for accents of red or other colors.

In a 1983 show at the Hiraya Gallery, Renato Habulan came up with a number of significant works attesting to the rich resources and range of his art. Two of the paintings of the show bear the curious titles of *Patigan*, a word which turns out to mean the army fatigue uniform and thus an allusion to militarization in the countryside. *Patigan* becomes the olive green and brown fatigue camouflage motif superimposed on the figures of men in confrontation, or on two mourning women with the touching folk gestures of grief. This same motif is also transparently superimposed with streaks and stains that allude to violence and tragedy on the image of the beloved *pangat*, in *Ala-ala ni Macliing*, above whose portrait a child's head rises in the mist of memory against the background of the rice terraces. In the sectional *Patigan sa Kanayunan*, the fatigue motif is superimposed on the cropped figures of peasants armed with bolos in postures of readiness in the upper section, and on the figures of men looking out from behind prison bars as from a chicken coop in the lower section. There is a greater spontaneity in the artist's use of the pencil sketch with wash for the figures in the intent to capture the spirit of journalistic immediacy. This particular painting was successfully reproduced in color accompanied by a text for ironic effect from a 1981 statement by Alexander Haig, US Secretary of State: "... the so-called wars of national liberation are putting in jeopardy our

ability to influence world events . . . and to assure access to raw materials."

Constant through his work is his deep-felt concern to understand the workers and peasants in their typical character as members of the traditionally exploited classes and in their concrete reality as individual human beings. *Mangagawang Bukid* is the portrait of a peasant in the particularity of his working clothes. It is the look that the artist successfully captures: a gaze at once alert and questioning and containing a soft reproach. The bright red scarf held in place by the white handkerchief lends a warm glow and vitality to the youthful face set against the dark neutral background of the vast monotony of the ricefields while above the horizon the sky modulates into red presaging a storm. Again, to reach a wider audience, this painting was also reproduced successfully in color with an accompanying text from Isaiah 58.6: "The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free."

His 1983 exhibit showed a number of directions: the highly accomplished paintings of man and machine, the paintings in frame sections eliciting meanings through the juxtaposition of images, and the large crowd paintings drawing inspiration from theater tableaux. In the first type, he juxtaposes human worker and inhuman machine or head of worker against a graph of production in works of a strong relational and dialectical character. In these there is a certain flatness of treatment, generally in gray monochrome, moreover, that lends itself easily to the poster format, as there are no modulating or transitional passages nor sense of containing atmosphere. Peasants and workers are depicted with their tools in a wide range of genre activities as the dynamic forces of production, and in their representation the artist shows his solid discipline in figure drawing. The machines described in minute and literal detail acquire an iconic character like a modern demanding deity to be placated with the daily sacrifice of the workers' blood, sweat, and tears. One of the best realized paintings of this type is *Kaayusan sa Agilang Pananaw*, which shows male and female workers and peasants at work around the framed image of a monster-machine. Yet the theme of man and machine, which contrasts puny and

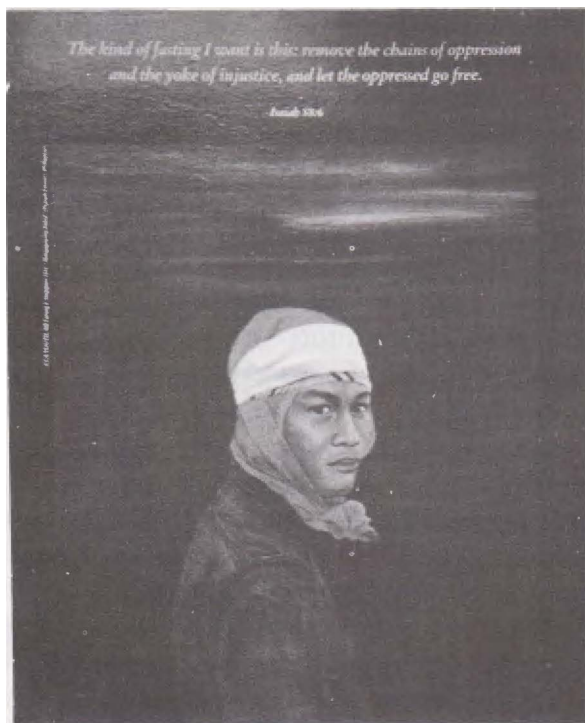
mortal humans with impersonal and mechanical structures, does not constitute the true dialectic. For man uses the machine as tool in the productive process, technology being an element of the productive forces. The true dialectic is that which arises from class exploitation.

In the multi-frame paintings such as *Nagbabantang Panahon* (Threatening Weather), the artist adds to the basic premises of realism a poetic mood which he achieves through a sense of space and atmosphere, enhanced by color and tonal modulations borrowed from baroque resources. The vast countryside of river and field is his setting, with a new nature poetry in the hovering sky and light delicately tracing the figures as they plan their strategies of struggle through the dangers and anxieties of their daily lives. The device of the thin wooden frames sectioning the images and at times cropping the figures is an extension of his earlier geometric sectioning device which served to bring out dialectical relationships of *sakada* and *ilustrado*. It is likewise derived from cinematic montage which juxtaposes disparate images, to create ironies or syntheses of meaning, as well as a device to get away from the traditional frame which he feels so easily becomes anecdotal. The multiframe also serve to contrast the cold statistics of graphs of production and corporate profit with the emotional content of human situations, as well as to introduce abstract passages to create mood and atmosphere and convey notions of shifting scale and universal dimensions. All these constitute thoughtful and stimulating efforts to renew realism and expand its range of expressiveness.

Still a third direction in his art is in the large tableau paintings filled with figures. Of these *Dulang Bayan* clearly draws its inspiration from people's theater and street plays — the artist himself had a brief stint with a theater group. The figures are ranged on several levels on which they act out the high points of the play while a chorus of youth in militant postures fills the base of the painting. Modulating shades of red are used for symbolic effect as well as for expressionistic intensity appropriate to the subject. Related to this series is the large-scale painting *Kagampan* (Fullness of Time) in which workers and peasants with their tools—the masses engaged in basic production—come forward in a formidable show of

solidarity and strength, hinting at a smoldering anger, to assume their historical role.

Renato Habulan continually strives to enrich his art and to make it more meaningful. The very size of his canvases demands a public venue for their exhibition; their content likewise precludes their being absorbed by interior design functions. At present he is engaged in research into popular images that make up the visual experience of the people: new and old photographs, religious icons, folk images. An important aspect of this experience lies in the area of religion which is the artist's ongoing concern. Since religion remains an important part of folk consciousness, the problem for the artist is how to decolonize religion in terms of folk images—a theme which he has begun to explore in his work.



AL MANRIQUE

Al Manrique was born in Quezon City in 1949. His professional training was in architecture in which he graduated with a degree from the University of Santo Tomas in 1970. Among the social realists, he enjoys the advantage of having lived in different parts of the country for extended periods of time, acquiring a broad range of experience in knowing people, their conditions and struggles, that is vital to social realism. He sometimes stays in Orion, Bataan where he has his ancestral roots in a coastal village near the Bataan Export Processing Zone, a highly politicized area in the control of multinational corporations. He has also been to Davao City which became his second home for a while.

As early as 1970, Al Manrique produced occasional works as socio-political comment. One of these, a striking work in black and white, is *Pananaw ni Hippocrates* (Sight of Hippocrates) which shows a blindfolded doctor examining an emaciated patient. This refers to doctors who examine the victims of military abuse and torture but who falsely testify, out of fear or pressure, that there are no indications of ill-treatment and that therefore the case has no basis. Manrique's membership in the Centre for the Advancement of Young Artists led to his association with the *Kaisahan* group which regularly held discussions and exhibits at the CAYA office at Buendia.

For a time, however, art as social and political comment remained as an alternative, perhaps secondary, to art of universal or cosmic themes. Thus, his first one-man show at the Solidaridad Gallery was the I-Malan series, pen and ink works inspired by the coastal scenery of Bataan where the coastline ends in high, jagged, and steep cliffs of volcanic rock. In his paintings, the crystalline shapes of the cliffs metamorphose into arresting female nudes, seemingly bound to the rocks against the neutral expanse of space and writhing or struggling to be free. The figures though small acquire a quality of cosmic grandeur, and the theme, while it tangentially touches upon women's liberation, is of a general and universal import. At the heart of the I-Malan series is the artist's homage to the beauty of Bataan's landscape — now ruthlessly marred by industrial

pollution, the nuclear power plant, and entire areas of some of the most beautiful natural landscapes in the Philippines given over to multinational free trade zones and to related anti-people structures. In fact, within this background, the series not only suggests feminist themes but also protests against the ravaging of the Philippine landscape and our natural environment. Alongside this concern is Al Manrique's academic training in architecture which explains his experiments in structural form.

In 1976, Al Manrique did his first print series on the Mountain Province, during a sojourn in Bontoc and Ifugao. These were largely figurative studies in black-and-white using mixed techniques of drypoint, etching, and aquatint. His second print series was the *Bata-batuta* (after a child's nursery rhyme), with children as subjects in relation to the struggle of their parents. In his prints, the artist makes use of tonal contrasts to create an emotional mood and atmosphere.

The artist turned to oils in 1978 with his *Nudes Series*. The works of this series were not, however, in the familiar approach to nudes as celebrations of the female figure. Rather, these were representations of the male figure in terms of its muscular structure. The artist's interest in structure again comes to the fore in these figures which derive their power and expressiveness from the play of light and shadow on the kinetic musculature, the strength and structural magnificence of the figures in varying relationships. An important work of this series is *Bunung Balikat* (Shoulder Wrestling) in the collection of the Ateneo Gallery and chosen as one of the pieces exhibited at the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena. In *Bunung Balikat*, the social implications lie below the surface, but the image of the cropped male torso with hands meeting at the back becomes translated to an image of repressed fury in the later *Pagtitimpi* (Smoldering Anger). Here, the cropped torso of a man has his arms held behind his back forming an X, the traditional position of a bound captive. The bulging sinews and veins down the length of the arms to the fists stand out like gnarled roots in the tension of restrained anger against the enemy who keeps him in bondage. The calloused hands will soon form into heavy striking fists, the traditional folk patience and long-suffering will rise against the daily institutionalized violence inherent in an ex-

plorative system. The powerful work, with its expressionistic handling of light and shadow, seems to suggest that when man finally breaks his bonds, physical, intellectual, and social, in order to strike, it will only be to shift the balance of justice in favor of the large, oppressed majority.

The artist opted to leave Manila for Davao in 1979 to immerse himself in the life of the people far from the cosmopolitan illusions of Manila. There in the new environment where city and countryside closely interact, the artist found much material worthy of being crystallized into art. His creativity sought new mediums and expressions. In oil, he painted *Mother and Child*, their frail silhouettes in the fields facing a glowing red sky. From earlier studies, he continued to produce numerous drawings in the conte series, in which he incorporated written texts such as personal reflections and passages of poetry on the social themes of exploited factory workers and poor peasants. *Sa Bawat Palit ng Hari* (With Every Change of King) shows a masked figure in native costume standing below a series of masks. The title here provides the necessary clue to the meaning of the work: within the bourgeois political structure, the successive changes of regime and ruler have not instituted real change but have only been a deceptive change in masks in the subservient puppetry to foreign imperialist interests. *Huwag Kang Matakot* (Do not Fear) admonishes the frail figure of a mother and her young son clinging to her skirts not to be afraid as they pass below the towering image of a powerful cigar-puffing comprador with the peso sign reflected in his glasses. Another shows a female figure stumbling but trying to rise beneath the shadow of a cross on which is superimposed a familiar cola bottle.

From his conte drawings, Al Manrique proceeded to his *Hands* series in oil consisting of more than ten paintings. In these he focused on the subject of hands to express a gamut of strong internal feelings as he used hands, an objective, physical feature, to convey the subjective and spiritual. The artist limits his field to hands, cropped from the rest of the figure and magnified, in order to achieve greater concentration and intensity. The artist's use of symbolism, which is an underlying characteristic of his work, plays an important part in this series.

Basically, hands signify human labor, the principal element in the forces of production. In communication, they supplement words by means of gestures, as well as telling movements and postures, conscious or unconscious. When words fail or are repressed, hands have a language of their own that knows no concealment or untruth. For the language of hands in a time of crisis, the artist has probed them sensitively as conveyors of feeling. The veined, calloused fingers and anemic, broken nails of workstained hands are of peasants and workers relating an entire life's story of poverty and struggle. In *Pagpipiglas* (Straining to Break Loose) several hands strain to slip free from the cords that bind them to servitude, a symbol of the condition of laboring classes. In *Tatlong Tali*, (Three Ropes) bony hands resist being dragged down by the weight from three taut cords tugging at the arms, here a symbolic allusion to the three evils of feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucrat capitalism. *Kurampot* (A Measly Handful), shows three pairs of hands reaching for rice in varying portions; the first reaches for a meager handful, the second has a bigger share, while the third helps itself to an abundant portion, an image symbolic of social inequality and injustice implied in the fact that it is those engaged in basic production who have the smallest share. In others of the series, fingers are bunched together into clenched fists, hands tug at the ropes that bind them, clutch themselves together in the tension of listening or waiting, or protectively enfold a hungry child. In *Paghuhubog*, a small oil painting, the hands holding tools of work signify the forces of production in which worker joins peasant in shaping and directing the movement for liberation.

Al Manrique came back from Davao in 1982 and began a series of oil paintings in a larger format. The themes center on labor, particularly on the solidarity of workers and on the strike as a weapon of labor. Some of these works likewise reflect his Davao experience of heightening militarization, hamletting and suppression of rights. A number, too, go beyond contemporary reality which has become painful and well-nigh intolerable to anticipate a new human order of the future.

Pagbibigkis (Bundling Together) symbolizes the solidarity of peasants and workers in the image of the peasant woman in

the foreground engaged in bundling together the golden harvest while behind her, in the middle ground, workers hold a mass action. The use of red, blue and gold, for the principal figure, alludes to the colors of the flag and thus transforms the simple act of bundling grain into the symbol of a national movement. The theme of labor in Al Manrique is often contextualized in the closely-knit traditional Filipino family. This context is seen in *Mula sa Dibdib ni Ina* (From Mother's Breast), *Habilin ni Ama* (Father's Dying Wish) and *Bukas ang Welga* (Strike Tomorrow). *Mula sa Dibdib ni Ina* shows a mother with three sons who, according to the artist, represent different stages of politicization. The mother-figure is the source of energy and inspiration with her eyes ablaze like red embers. In *Habilin ni Ama*, a mother and child are seen against a hazy expressionistic background of figures with a red flag in postures suggesting torture and death. The child's backward glance establishes the bond between father and son in the continuity of the struggle, while the mother looks forward with hope into the future. *Bukas ang Welga* shows the family of a worker who, as the title states, anticipates and prepares for a strike on the morrow. Militancy is symbolized in the workers' poster of a hand wielding a hammer. The emphasis on the sinewy arms and powerful hands derives from his earlier Hands series and here brings out the dynamism of the productive forces. It is night and the family in vigil wait for dawn beside a window through which is seen the lights of the factory and the houses of the community. The predominant red tones symbolize political militancy and create a warm emotional atmosphere.

Images of children abound in his works, a fact which is not surprising in the context of the Third World with its teeming young population. *Nagaaral ang Mamumuno* (The Future Leader Learns) expressly dwells on the theme of youth. A boy in the foreground silently watches a demonstration march by with banners bearing anti-imperialist slogans. The child assumes particular significance in the national struggle for democracy, freedom and justice as it represents the new generation.

Ang Mabuhay sa Takot (To Live in Fear) is one of the artist's most important paintings of the period. Done in 1983, the work is rooted in the artist's exposure in Davao, particularly

in his first hand-observation of the hamletting of the peasants into makeshift villages so that the military may be able to observe the movements of the peasants more closely and efficiently in order to pinpoint and isolate insurgents. Here a group of frightened and emaciated children huddle together under the shadow of a shiny army boot hanging from a nail on the wall which also displays the census list of the members of the family. The boot signifies the immediate presence of the military which claims territorial rights. The wary staring eyes of the children and their brown skin tones which in this painting have a metallic harshness convey the suffering of the masses. Beyond this painting is the reality of the Davao hamlets consisting of bunkhouses put together hastily with chicken wire and woven bamboo with but one wall against the wind.

In the face of present suffering and sorrow, Al Manrique has recourse to an image of hope in *Salubong sa Bagong Umaga* (Welcome to the New Morning) in which a young man, thoroughly Malay and indigenous of aspect to signify decolonization and independence, stands smiling and triumphant against the high blue mountains of freedom while, in the renewed greenness of the environment, the barbed wires and prisons have been broken down to make way for a new human order.

JOSE TENCE RUIZ

While still preparing for his first one-man show, Jose Tence Ruiz, was already widely known as one of the most prolific and original of magazine illustrators. His editorial illustrations for the now defunct *Who* magazine to which he contributed weekly, for *Review*, and *Business Page* have significantly raised the standards of graphics in the country. Aside from these of which he has collected a sizeable body, Bogie Ruiz has also done a painting series, as well as various work in mixed media, such as box art with found objects and three-dimensional constructions.

Particularly striking in the work of Jose Tence Ruiz, in whatever form or medium, is the original and highly creative way that he goes about his art. His approach is many-sided, multi-linear, as all elements in his work dynamically interact, the personal with the social, the sacred with the profane, tragedy with comedy. As artist, Jose Tence Ruiz does not walk straight up to the creature Meaning and seize it presumptuously with both hands. Instead, he waits slyly at the wings for the creature continually metamorphosing and changing its aspect, tracks it through the dark mazes of the unconscious into clear day, stalks and woos it as in hunting, then, suddenly in the flash of insight, he has it in hand, the marvelous quivering creature, all delicate, gawky and alarmed, its tones convulsively changing yet.

A 1979 graduate of UST, where he now teaches anatomy to art students, Bogie Ruiz began with a series of austere gray and white paintings, still lifes with objects as symbols. From this he proceeded to his Shirts Series which he considers his first important body of work. In mixed media, this consisted of shirts which the artist himself cut and sewed from canvas and impregnated with water-based synthetic resin then embedded in several coats of acrylic, given a finishing with oil impasto and the entire essemblage then mounted on wood. What the series conveyed was an intuitive sense of expressive form in the masses of crumpled shirt half embedded in the heavily-textured monochrome ground. The several works of these series form the *Alienation Suite*, for the two-dimensional works invite a

thoughtful contemplation which stirs in the mind subliminal associations and fragments of experience. The shirts are forlorn, empty shells. White or ecru, streaked and stained by time, weather and human circumstance, they are, in his words, "spectres of human presence without presence," as an abandoned room or a vacated house still exudes the tensions of its erstwhile occupants. *Kaluluwang Kalawangin* (Rusty Soul), symbolizing one of the forms of alienation, has the hollow torso exposed to reveal a sorry assemblage of oil cans, crushed aerosol containers, and assorted metal objects in lieu of the vital organs. The mood of reflective melancholy is at times tinged with uncertainty, as in *Pait ng Pag-aalinlangan* (Bitterness of Doubt), expressive of self-alienation.

In 1978, Bogie Ruiz began his *Bus and Jeepney* series which began as two-dimensional paintings marked by bright colors and unusual angles of vision. A key painting is *Nakatayo Na'y Nagbabayad Pa* (Paying Fare Even Without a Seat), in oil and tinting colors on canvas, in an expressionistic genre style. Here it is from the point of view of the driver (unseen) as he looks at the rear-view mirror to see a male passenger standing on the dashboard and stooping inside to hand in a coin for his fare. The backlighting of the figure and its direct gesture endow the work with a concentrated energy. A counterpart painting to this is one in watercolor and felt-tip pen which gives the view of the jeepney's "cockpit" with its dazzling array of knobs and decals in fluorescent hues having the total effect of a brightly flashing video game machine. This series developed into the three-dimensional work, *Jeepney, Tagilira't Tapalodo* (Jeepney, Side and Hood), which shows the side of the vehicle with a row of passenger's heads done in resin with a wire framework. In the same period, the artist also did some transitional works, also in 3-d, entitled *Regalo*, in which ironic comment is implied in the Christmas baskets wrapped in yellow cellophane but containing various items of junk and refuse instead of the traditional leg of ham and bottle of wine.

These works became a springboard to box art in which Tence Ruiz has done some of the most remarkable three-dimensional works in the local art scene — works that attest to a large, though highly discerning creative appetite. First, the boxes, in

sections emblazoned with decorative detail in the pop idiom, feature hinged doors that open out like medieval triptychs to reveal various personages within, again surrounded by a personal and flamboyant iconography. One here encounters *Kikong Bateria* proud in his stiff box-front of an American coat-and-tie but showing rugged bare feet where the facade ends— a witty comment on cultural identity. Of the assembled fellows, the most *sigá* or boastfully colorful is *Erding Erdrayb at ang Kanyang Palasyong Agaw-Tanaw* (Driver Erding and his Now-You-See-It-Now-You-Don't Palace). In this figure the artist brings together all the elements of a survivalist psyche— all the talismans that he can clutch at in moments of crisis which are, in fact, all the time: doors that swing between the sacred and the profane, the Japanese Mekanda robot of television fame, visual allusions to the Filipino worker's Saudi (mis) adventure, a knife neatly laid on a tray as "his daily serving of danger and violence" (*nabubuhay na kapit sa patalim*, surviving by the cutting edge of a knife), and his calendar consisting of firsts of the month in which every day is a new beginning after yesterday's death, and "where past and future are not as important as the present." Erding Erdrayb himself is a large torso which is built from an upright pay telephone, taken up when used then summarily dropped when no longer needed. He is bolstered with stereo tapes and a radio dial to turn on and off at will. His brave chest is tattooed with the Nazarene, in allusion to the popular Quiapo cult with its miraculous potencies of the last resort. His belly is filled with assorted debris that he accumulates from the makeshift food stalls that offer measly creature comfort along the route.

In early 1981 Bogie Ruiz did *Minibus*, a striking symbolic work of the facade of a minibus with a raving mad driver precipitating his human cargo into careening catastrophe. Through the curtains can be glimpsed faces of anguish gilded over, while Mr. Big's profile, stylistically repeated in series, is surrounded by a battery of modern heraldic emblems: dollars, guns, loudspeakers, and chains. Veiled allusions to violence are scattered about: barbed wire wrapped with deceptive velvet ribbons, roses eaten by caterpillars, and a butterfly with a chewed-off wing. Strips of red felt are glued here and there, on

and around the corners as a tactile reference to coagulated blood. In a section above, a severed arm in *rigor mortis* is bandaged in blood, while crammed below is a mutilated cat run over while jumping into the oncoming lights of the vehicle—all symbols of violence in the form of daily oppression, torture, and brutalization.

In continual search of the substance and grit of daily reality, Bogie Ruiz sheds the usual bourgeois squeamishness to spend time in the arenas of the masses, such as the big cockpit at La Loma or the reeking Tondo abbatoirs. From these sorties, he created another folk character, *Tinolang Tinalo si Hari Manok Yari Manok at ang Iba Pang Martir sa La Loma*. In the central compartment of this box work are hung three chicken carcasses stuffed with old stove parts, switches, and batteries, while all around the culinary sacrifice are various allusions, sacred as the Saint Peter image, and profane, as the masculine cock, that make up the psychic paraphernalia of a feudal macho culture. This seemingly uninhibited proliferation of symbols in a continuous, progressive, and climactic pace builds up a tension, an excitement that is at the heart of Tence Ruiz' work. His art bristles electrically with metaphors. They make, on one hand, visual texts of socio-political import, and on the other hand, fertile studies for semioticians: signifiers and signifieds transformed into the language of art.

It is from the same fund of resources and experiences that these various artistic expressions have drawn their expressive richness. These include his cigarette series, the *Katay* (Slaughter) Series of large paintings, his styrofoam-based life-size figure sculpture, and his distinctive magazine illustrations. In *Katay*, new works in oil, his art seemingly wants to structure his generous artistic impulses and mellow his energies on large, expressionist works. His central image is the carcass, which in the tradition of Rembrandt and Chaim Soutine, has to do with the transformation of a terrifying and repulsive physical fact into a resonant spiritual symbol. For an authentic approach, Bogie Ruiz spent hours with the *mataderos* of Tondo to observe how they go about their gory occupation. *Katay* emphasizes the aspect of death and corruption expanded and elaborated into the themes of violence and exploitation, including prostitution,

sexual or in more sophisticated forms, as in faces masked in shame or assuming a dishonorable anonymity. In the large painting of a faceless nude dancer emerging from the livid flanks of a carcass, the sinister decaying beast is the System which brings forth objects of exploitation for the imperialist masters. Another painting of the series shows Galman, the fall guy in the Aquino murder, his face and tightly bound body in the belly itself of the rotting hulk, the monster. Images of the slaughterhouse are central in the *Katay* series as symbols of the violence in contemporary society arising from exploitative relationships as well as the decay and corruption of the present social structure sustained by American imperialist interests. Likewise in progress is a lifesize sculpture for a big assemblage entitled *Pagpupugay kina Panagoulis, Sison, Morales, at Iba Pa Nilang Kasandiwa* (Homage to Panagoulis, Sison, Morales and their Other Soulmates). His illustrations are marked by remarkable energy and invention, full of witty visual puns in a technique basically consisting of the creative montage and juxtaposition of visual elements, surrealist in approach, in order to discover new insights in a subject.

Jose Tence Ruiz exemplifies an artist who comes to terms in his own way with the problem of art, politics, and social reality, as he creates images of contemporary human meaning in his inimitable personal style: brilliant streaked with macabre irony, where, through the familiar colorful masks of day, a death's head grins in this bloody time of reckoning.

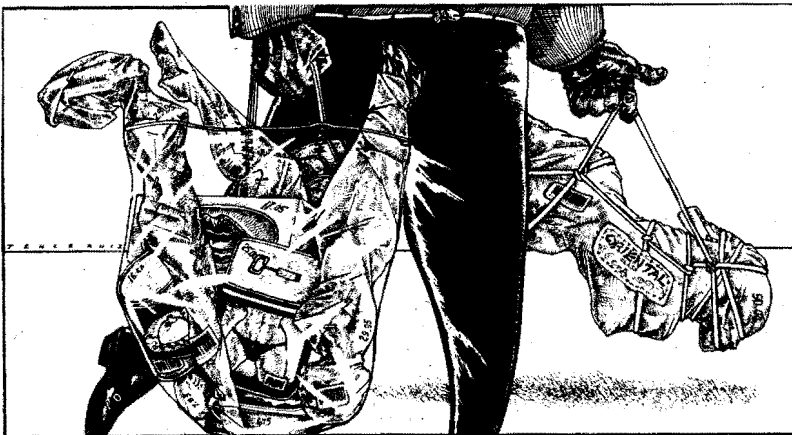


Illustration (WHO magazine, 1983)
Jose Tence Ruiz

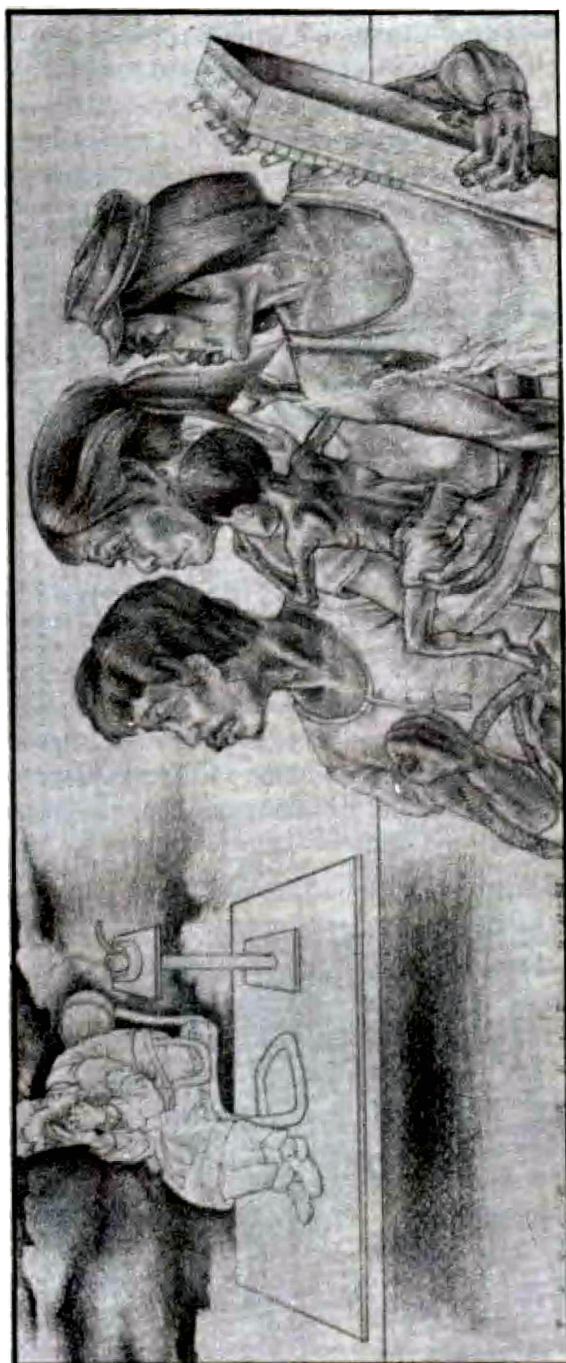


Illustration (WHO magazine, 1983)
Jose Tence Ruiz

LATER ARTISTS

The artists hitherto discussed were at one time or other associated with the original group of social realists, the *Kaisahan*, in the early Seventies. They have been largely responsible for the theoretical underpinnings and development of the school. Since then, there has been a widening of sympathies with the attraction of more artists. Of the new practicing artists dealing with socio-political issues in their art, some of these have spontaneously and willingly assumed the social realist title. Among these are Nunelucio Alvarado, Federico Sievert, and Rey Paz Contreras in sculpture. Social realism has, in fact, gained adherents among regional artist groups, particularly in Davao, Negros, and Cebu. These groups have come up with large-scale works and murals on various issues in styles open to technical innovation and the use of non-traditional materials. Outstanding regional artists are Nunelucio Alvarado who has developed an expressive personal idiom which incorporates folk elements and who has held a one-man show at the Hiraya and participated in group shows in various galleries and Noe Tio who integrates the minorities of Mindanao such as the T'boli into the context of the national struggle and who draws from his immediate experience of urban conflict in Davao's Agdao district which he refers to as "Nicaragdao."

Also clearly social realist are the works of the political detainees who have developed their art within the confines of the prison walls. First among them is Edicio de la Torre, "Father Ed" who has developed a striking personal style in painting and illustration. In whatever medium or form his work is characterized by a sensitivity and expressiveness creating an art of luminosity and clarity without precluding depth and richness. His images possess a singular concentration and unity in a style of lyrical symbolism. Other artist detainees, who together with Father Ed exhibited in 1984 at the Sining Kamalig are Alan Jazmines, Noel Etabag, and Manuel Mario Guzman. Guzman's *Nightmare* depicts a male figure caught in a web of chains transformed into a giant spider web within which he reaches out longingly towards the liberating space beyond. Noel Etabag's works have as element the prison tower that beams its

searchlight over the scene, a symbol of repression which is, however, transcended and surpassed by various forms of the people's struggle, including that of the detainees themselves. Alan Jazmines' *Ang Kasaysayan Ay Nasa Kamay ni Juan de la Cruz* (History Is in the Hands of Juan de la Cruz) makes use of human hands as symbols of the power of labor and protest.

Among the active social realists are the illustrators and poster designers who have amply answered the continuing need to present issues in effective and eloquent visual form. Among the artists who have been active in these forms are Ana Fer, Alex Umali, Gilbert Torres, Marcelino Cadiz, Jr., Emilio Rivera III as well as Ronald Velasco. Their artistic contribution in these popular forms constitutes an important aspect of social realism.

Likewise, a number of artists have been associated with the group although they have not maintained a consistent production. Heber Bartolome, for instance, has dealt with nationalism in both painting and the print medium, but he has seemed to find more fulfillment as a composer-singer of issue-oriented songs. Also belonging to this group are Jess Abrera, a cartoonist of wit and humor, Abet Jimenez, who has dealt with the theme of industrial pollution, Joe Cuaresma, Vin Toledo and Egay Roxas.

Artists, not necessarily identified with the social realists, have occasionally found common cause with them in particular issues. Santi Bose, for instance, transformed his deep interest in and affinity with the Cordillera groups into a political statement in his massive cement painting-relief of protest entitled *Drown My Soul in the Chico Dam*. That excellent printmaker in mezzotint, Fil de la Cruz, has likewise espoused the cause of the national minorities, particularly the Suban-on of Mindanao, in images expressing the despoliation of their forests and the loss of their ancestral lands to unscrupulous loggers and land-grabbers. Arnel Agawin, in his latest exhibit at the Hiraya, made use of non-traditional materials such as twigs, handmade paper in collage, to affirm the values of organic wholeness against the threat of nuclear disaster.

Earlier, established artists such as Ang Kiu Kok, Onib Olmedo, Danny Dalena, and Bencab did paintings which bordered on protest since they touched upon issues such as class

oppression, poverty, suppression of freedoms. Their art represented a quest for symbols of the "human condition" and rather than particularly realist was expressionistic and bearing a strong individual and emotional stamp.

An event which had strong repercussions on the art scene was the assassination at the airport of the former Senator Aquino. Clearly demonstrating the relationship between socio-political events and art, the event was followed by a rash of protest art in all media: painting, sculpture, and two- and three-dimensional expressions in mixed media, often to accompany the street demonstrations in Quiapo and Makati. Conceptual artist Briccio Santos came up with a unique group sculpture borne on a jeepney showing bound figures and taped eyes. Alfonso S. Medilo, a finalist in the First Annual Metrobank Competition, did an ingenious painting in the form of a game in movable square sections containing elements based on photographs of the assassination meant to be shifted and positioned to form a coherent image, but with one section missing. Even known abstractionists such as Phyllis Zabalero paid tribute to Aquino by alluding to his figure sprawled as though in mid-flight on the tarmac.

Worthy of particular mention among the artists of social themes are Ana Fer and Imelda Cajipe-Endaya. Ana Fer had first-hand exposure to the plight of the minorities in anthropological field research among the Tagbanua in Palawan in connection with Nicole Macdonald's transcription and study of the Kudaman epic. Her first protest illustrations dealt with the commodification of the cultural heritage of the minorities upon contact with exploiting urban entrepreneurs in the antique trade. Along with these was a small series of oil paintings drawn from the life, natural setting and rituals of the Palawan groups in which the influence of Southeast Asian painting idioms, particularly the Balinese, could be perceived. Her more recent numerous illustrations and posters while retaining this influence, developed into a greater dynamism of line and strong compelling rhythms based on the patterns of nature and organic growth. All in all, her art proves the effectivity and validity of new and imaginative approaches to socio-political themes.

Imelda Cajipe Endaya started out as a printmaker who explored elements of native iconography which she recombined and situated into a contemporary art context to evoke new insights and create shifts of meaning. She developed the historical aspect of her work into a series of expressionistic and painterly works which probed the tensions between tradition and modernity that continue to this day. Historico-cultural contexts fuse in her work: the Spanish colonial culture, the indigenous, and the living traditions of the non-Christian groups, the urban with its neo-colonial character, the rural of native folk, contemporary hi-tech in the space age and feudal folk ways. The woman has always been the central figure in her work: woman as Eve, as mother, as Maria Clara, or as call girl, whose innocence is violated by modern lifestyle, by male cupidity, and by oppressive reality itself, at the same time that she experiences an awakening often brusque. The artist's strongest statement on the traditional bondage of woman is a large painting in collage and mixed media which shows a female figure bound tightly from head to foot with hints of painful anguish in the bloody wounds that are glimpsed through the gaps in her binding. Another large painting with collaged materials such as nipa thatch and dyed fabric alludes to the assassination as brown faces register shock, grief, and mourning at the fallen figure. Her best work is an orchestration of images and feeling, as they sensitively capture the native Filipino soul in the faces of men, women and children living through an intense situation with the immediacy and materiality of textures that have a compelling and poignant appeal.

Social realism also has its sculptors in Jerusalino "Gerry" Araos and Rey Contreras. Freedom is a central theme in the work of Araos due to his experience in solitary confinement and detention. His first exhibit at the Hiraya revolved on the symbolism of birds as he explored their form in wood and plastiglass. Through his works, one comes to realize that the bird is the central symbol of our times both in the visual arts (prison art has widely popularized this symbol) and in song, as in the well-loved "*Bayan Ko*", the theme song of demonstrations. In a later show, he did the *Bartolina Series*, several levels of wooden bars, their number corresponding to his days in

prison. A work of protest in which volume and space interact is *Balimbing*, a gallows-like structure from which hangs a sectional piece of back-to-back figures suggesting hypocrisy and deceit. His sculptures which have a functional aspect are meant to set their mark in an outdoor setting where the viewer's spatial interaction with the sculpture also becomes an experience in meaning.

Rey Paz Contreras' first important work is *Agrarian Revolution* in which he shows, in a fusion of realism and imaginative wit, the evolution of the tools of production in agriculture. As such, it has a historical dimension in the theme of the development of technology from primitive materials such as bone to more and more sophisticated implements. Still within the context of production and the implied homage to labor is the later *Sacred Land Series* which also brings out the theme of the indigenous cultural traditions symbolized by the anitos and masks. The indigenous heritage continues to express itself in a creativity that springs from the rich soil and to bring forth forms that evolve into a technology of tools or into cultural artifacts that reflect the native spirit. It is in his nationalistic themes that the art of Contreras links up with the social realists.

Conclusion

In response to the crisis confronting the country today, an increasingly large number of artists have, in the last five years, dealt with the themes of protest, exposing social ills and pointing to alternative solutions. Last year, the strength of the movement was seen in the large exhibit of the Committee for the Advancement of a Filipino People's Art which brought together in an unprecedented occasion the works of committed artists from various countries side by side with those of Filipino social realists from Manila and the regions. Also notable was the increase in interaction with foreign artists through exhibits, workshops and conferences held here and abroad, in Japan, India, and Europe — valuable experiences which have lent social realism here a larger breadth and vision.

Likewise, small groups have proliferated and sprung on their own initiative, a welcome sign, in fact, which gives the

movement a plurality of centers while avoiding an overcentralized Manila-based organization. Even recent national painting competitions such as the Metrobank Painting Awards in 1985 and 1986 have shown a distinct tendency towards art of socio-political content along with the pursuit of technical refinement and innovativeness of form.

The trend in social realism continues with the past year's exhibit of social realists in small format, including works by Pablo Baens Santos, Antipas Delotavo, Renato Habulan, and Jess Abrera, and Jose Tence Ruiz' first one-man show. New groups as SETA (Self-Expression through Art) led by Arnel Mirasol have made recent contributions to the movement. At the same time that more galleries have opened their doors to the social realists, the artists themselves have been active in non-gallery forms such as portable murals, posters, editorial cartoons and illustrations and outdoor three-dimensional sculptures in paper mache, forms with which they communicate with a larger and national public.

Doubtless, social realism has asserted itself as a strong and lasting trend in Philippine art. From the small group of trail-blazing artists, it has spread to the different regions of the country and has guided many young artists of talent who believe that art crystallizes the experiences and aspirations of a people and that art, in its social and political dimensions, is a vital part of the historical moment, of lived life in the present struggle, at the same time that it projects a vision of a new human order that has inspired our hearts and minds.



Footnotes

- 1) Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 55.
- 2) Harold Osborne, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 11.
- 3) *Ibid.*
- 4) *Ibid.*
- 5) G. V. Plekhamov, *Art and Social Life*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1957), p. 12.
- 6) *Ibid.*
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 8) As cited in Plekhanov, p. 38.
- 9) Zygmunt Bauman, *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (Hutchinson of London, 1978), p. 121.
- 10) *Ibid.*
- 11) H. Benac, *Guide pour la Recherche des idées dans les dissertations et les études Littéraires* (Paris: Hachette, 1961), p. 14.
- 12) Wolff, *op cit.*, p. 37
- 13) Vinayak Purohit, *Art and Technology* (Bombay, 1983), pp. 1-4.
- 14) Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (Cleveland: Meridian Books 1950), p. 29.
- 15) Mao Tse Tung, "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art" in *Selected Writings from the Works of Mao Tse Tung*. (London: Anglo-Chinese Educational Institute), p. 38.
- 16) Linda Nochlin *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 13.
- 17) Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, Vol. IV (New York: Vintage Books), pp. 166-7.
- 18) Nochlin, *op cit.*, p. 36.
- 19) Ernest Fischer, *The Necessity of Art* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 106.
- 20) Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), pp. 38-9.
- 21) Jack Salzman, ed., *Years of Protest* (New York: Pegasus, 1967), p. 100.
- 22) *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- 23) Baigell, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
- 24) Maynard Solomon, ed., *Marxism and Art* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 218.

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